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OFFICIAL REPORT

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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 182**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Monday 3 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Infrastructure, Gwent

1. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit Caldicot, Gwent, to discuss development of the infrastructure.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): No, Sir.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State nevertheless recognise the increasing importance of Caldicot, which is supposed to be the site of the second Severn crossing? Residents who live alongside the site fear the congestion that there will be in the area, particularly on the B4245. Can the Secretary of State give an up-to-date assessment? As for the transport difficulties in the area, residents are calling for a park-and-ride facility at the Severn tunnel junction and a halt at Magor. Will the right hon. Gentleman do what he can to push those projects?

Mr. Hunt: We are pleased to announce the advancement of work on the access road, subject to the satisfactory completion of parliamentary procedures. The access road east of junction 23 at Magor will be used by construction traffic for the second Severn crossing toll plaza; otherwise, it would have used the B4245 through Magor and Undy. I hope that that will reassure local residents. I will consider carefully the hon. Gentleman's other point.

Sir Anthony Meyer: When the Secretary of State visits Gwent to discuss infrastructure, would he care also to discuss with the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) the superstructure of the Labour party?

Mr. Hunt: I am not sure that that will be possible, but the news that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is to continue as leader of the Labour party is the best news that I have heard for a very long time.

Mr. Anderson: As I hope that the Secretary of State knows, Caldicot is alongside the Severn tunnel junction and the main through rail route to Ireland. Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to look at the European rail network as projected by British Rail, which shows a thick black line along the north Wales route to Ireland and seems to put much less priority on the south Wales route to Ireland? Will the Secretary of State consider that matter in the light of the development needs of south Wales and try to ensure that the south Wales route to Ireland is not neglected?

Mr. Hunt: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that, subject to British Rail's commercial judgment, it is vital that Wales should get the best possible advantage out of the construction of the channel tunnel.

Tertiary Education

3. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the implementation of tertiary education in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* Wales as a whole.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): The establishment of tertiary education is inevitably linked with proposals by local education authorities to reorganise their secondary provision. I have received numerous representations from members of the public in Clwyd and

other parts of Wales on a range of issues connected with secondary reorganisation, including the principle of tertiary education.

Mr. Jones: I hope that the Minister supports the principle of tertiary education and that when he receives representations from Clwyd county council for the funding of its proposals he will listen sympathetically and make sure that the authority gets enough finance to put tertiary education properly in place in a way that will work and will help Welsh-medium tertiary provision in Clwyd and Wales as a whole.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Of course I acknowledge that there is a great deal to be said for tertiary education, which has the advantage of combining sixth-form education with further education. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I do not come into the discussions of the proposals in Clwyd or elsewhere. My right hon. Friend comes into them only when proposals are made to change the character of secondary schools, possibly as a result of tertiary education proposals.

Mr. Raffan: As and when my hon. Friend receives approaches from Labour-controlled Clwyd county council for extra funding for tertiary education, will he reject them until the authority has made an effective reduction in surplus places in the primary and secondary sectors?

Sir Wyn Roberts: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the problem of surplus places. There are 2,779 surplus places in the secondary sector in Clwyd and 44,597 in secondary schools in Wales. I assure my hon. Friend that it is not the practice of the Welsh Office to allocate funds where they are not justified to the hilt.

Dr. Thomas: Will the Minister confirm that he has received the organisation plans for tertiary education in Gwynedd and that Ministers will be able to reach an early decision on the scheme, which for the first time provides for development in further education at Dwyfor in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and at Dolgellau in my constituency? Will he ensure that any plans for north Wales will be integrated between Gwynedd and Clwyd to ensure maximum border participation and so that pre-16 education at Ysgol y Berwyn Bala can be maintained?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I confirm that statutory objections have been lodged to the proposals of Gwynedd local education authority to reduce the age range of Ysgol y Berwyn Bala as part of a proposal to introduce a tertiary system. The case is currently with the Welsh Office and I therefore cannot comment on its merits.

Mr. Michael: It is disappointing that the Minister sounded a little half-hearted about tertiary education. Is he aware of its attractiveness to many young people in Wales? Given our desperate need as a nation to improve the standards of education and training and to breathe new life into them, will he note that the proportion of young people staying on past the age of 16 rose from about a third to almost a half in the catchment area of Coleg Glan Hafren, the new tertiary college in my constituency? Will the Minister give more positive encouragement and take responsibility for providing help and finance for authorities to speed up the introduction of tertiary education in Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is not for me to distinguish or discriminate between tertiary colleges, sixth-form colleges or traditional sixth forms, which are all options for consideration by local education authorities. The hon. Gentleman will know that there are tertiary colleges in Gwent, West Glamorgan and South Glamorgan. Gwynedd, as he heard, is considering them and Mid Glamorgan is, I understand, reviewing provision for 11 to 19-year-olds. It is for local education authorities to decide which system is preferable in each case.

National Library of Wales

4. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the national library of Wales at Aberystwyth.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The national library of Wales will continue to operate under the terms of its royal charter, which lays down the objects for its functions. It will receive grant in aid, including capital, of about £5·75 million next year. This represents an increase of nearly 18 per cent. compared with this year.

Mr. Howells: I am sure that the Minister will agree that hon. Members are proud of our national institutions such as the national library of Wales. Will he give a categorical assurance that the library's status will continue for many years to come?

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are no plans to review the copyright status of the national library of Wales. Under that status, it is entitled to claim all publications, but there is no requirement that it should do so. In the interests of efficiency, it is incumbent on the national library and on other copyright libraries to keep their collections policy under constant review.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am glad to hear my hon. Friend's excellent announcement of grant in aid. Does not that give the clearest indication of the Government's support for the national library of Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are not only allocating £5·7 million to the national library next year. We are currently funding the outstore building which is under construction at the library at a cost of £1·8 million. We also footed the bill for some necessary repairs, at a cost of £1·1 million last year. Moreover, back in the early 1980s we financed the provision of a second book stack at the library.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Minister of State realise that rumours about departmental closures and downgrading are a source of grave concern to those who support the library and to those who work there? Does he accept that the library is not a luxury but a valuable national resource? Bearing in mind that the next century will be information driven, why does not the hon. Gentleman take a positive view and ensure that the national library is able to make the best use of satellites and fibre optics? Will he show that he intends to support this great national resource 100 per cent?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I think that we have already shown it in the figures that I gave in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones). I wholly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the library is a most valuable resource and we are extremely proud of it. I am sorry that

the staff inspection report, which was an internal document for comment by the Welsh Office and the national library, has been misinterpreted somewhat mischievously. We have already been in touch with the library to discuss modernisation and the use of all modern accessories to knowledge.

Pollution Inspectorate

5. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Government have plans to expand the staffing and funding of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in Wales in 1991.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): At present, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has nine inspectors responsible for pollution control in Wales. My right hon. Friend will keep the position under review with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Dr. Howells: Is the Minister aware that many people living in communities in south Wales are very worried about the inadequacy of the inspectorate? What promises of future funding can the hon. Gentleman give to allay the fears in communities such as Llantrisant, Baglan bay and Cwmbran? Can he promise a better life in future to those who have to suffer the filthy smog that so often descends on their homes at present?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman questions the adequacy of provision for HMIP. We are determined to ensure that that provision is kept up to the mark and constantly reviewed, and under the integrated pollution regulations there will probably be a requirement to increase the complement of staff.

Local Government Finance

6. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with local government representatives from Wales on the working of the community charge.

Mr. David Hunt: I have had several such discussions.

Mr. Wigley: In view of the enthusiasm that the Secretary of State and his colleagues showed for the candidacy of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in the recent leadership election, will he tell the House that he wholeheartedly supports the attempts of that right hon. Gentleman to do away with the poll tax, lock, stock and barrel? Is he aware of the devastating effect that the tax is having on people on low incomes in Wales? Is he aware that, in respect of a third of those due to pay, the cost of collection will be greater than the sums that the authorities will receive? Can he assure us that the poll tax will be brought to an end at the end of this financial year?

Mr. Hunt: No, I cannot, but I wholeheartedly endorse the expressed need for a thorough, constructive and fundamental review.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when people in Wales or elsewhere choose not to pay their community charge they are saying that they want someone to pay it on their behalf, and that that is really getting up people's noses? Does my right hon. Friend agree that people should pay their way and that those who are not paying the community charge are the same people who have been in rent arrears and rate arrears in the past? They want everything for nothing. They want someone else to pay for them.

Mr. Hunt: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that anyone not paying the community charge is seeking to have a free ride at the expense of the rest of the community. I am confident that the vast majority of the people in Wales will pay their community charge.

Mr. Barry Jones: As a Minister of State at the Department of the Environment the right hon. Gentleman tried to reform the poll tax, but in a recent parliamentary answer he confirmed his belief that the poll tax is fair, as he also said on 15 January. Does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that the only decent thing to do with the poll tax is to abolish it? As the proud architect of it, does he still support the hated poll tax and does he still support it in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: Not only I but the vast majority of people support the principle behind the community charge—that everyone should pay something towards the cost of the local services that they use. As to the future, the hon. Gentleman will know that Labour's proposal is to return to the unjust, inequitable domestic rating system. If he wants to bandy quotations with me, I am quite willing to enter into a contest. The Leader of the Opposition, describing local rates, said:

"The most unjust of all taxes"—

[Interruption] The Opposition do not like that and I do not blame them. The Leader of the Opposition said:

"The most unjust of all taxes, local rates, take most from those who can afford least."

That is what the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is proposing.

Mr. Livsey: To use fading terminology, will the Secretary of State abolish the poll tax at a stroke and replace it with a local income tax based on people's ability to pay, as recommended by the Layfield Committee?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman will know that when we considered various proposals for local taxation in the Green Paper in the early 1980s, we looked at a number of proposals including local income tax and we concluded that of all the systems then on offer the community charge represented the best, and we then introduced it. However, it is right that, having introduced a new system, we should constantly and continually keep it under review and that is exactly what we propose to do.

Housing

7. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of district councils in Wales to discuss housing matters in the Principality.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend addressed members of the Council of Welsh Districts on 18 September, when housing and other matters were discussed. I chaired a meeting of the Welsh housing consultative committee on 9 August.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that even on his own figures, 20,000 people in Wales are homeless as we approach Christmas? Bearing in mind that the

Government have been in office for nearly 12 years, does he accept that that is a disgraceful and crushing indictment of their housing policy?

Mr. Grist: I notice that the hon. Gentleman's council of Torfaen has been able to cut homelessness by 15 per cent. in the 12 months to March, which rather gives the impression that if other councils put their minds to the provision of housing instead of actually building houses, they could make better use of the money available to them —which, after all, increased by 15 per cent. this year over the previous year's figure—and the £2 million which was made available especially to local authorities for homelessness provision. That is the way the hon. Gentleman should look forward.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We are all grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the hard work that he puts in at the Welsh Office. He has become a very good Minister, not least on the subject of housing. What is the latest allocation to Housing for Wales and what will it mean in terms of new houses?

Mr. Grist: I thank my hon. Friend for the very kind start to his remarks. The increase in the current year was 42 per cent. on the previous year, which itself was 30 per cent. up on the previous year. Through Tai Cymru we have been providing adequate provision for housing association build, which many local authorities have been putting to good use by adding more than £17 million of their own money to get joint financing. That is the way forward which we believe would best answer the needs of specific groups whom local authorities are seeking to house.

Farming

8. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the effect of the current GATT negotiations on the future of Welsh farming.

Mr. David Hunt: Whatever compensatory measures come out of the Commission, we shall work hard to ensure that they are in the best interests of Welsh farmers.

Mr. Davies: Why do not the Government take the opportunity presented by the GATT negotiations to renegotiate the common agricultural policy so that, instead of benefiting bureaucrats and middlemen, it benefits producers and consumers? Is the 30 per cent. currently agreed by the Council the maximum cut that the Government will support? If so, precisely what measures does the Secretary of State intend to introduce so that upland farmers, particularly those in Wales, will be protected from the adverse effects of those cuts?

Mr. Hunt: The figure that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned has, of course, been in place since 1986—a lengthy period. It does not necessarily mean a 30 per cent. cut in prices. I am aware of the difficulties that Welsh farmers face at present and I have discussed them with many farmers on visits to a range of farms in Wales. It is my intention and that of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that, when the GATT negotiations are, as I hope, successfully concluded—let us not forget that agriculture is one of 15 separate issues being discussed in the Uruguay round—we must press for the right measures to be introduced to enable Welsh hill farmers in particular to get a good deal out of the Community.

Toxic Fumes, Rhymney

9. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the recent escape of toxic fumes in Rhymney.

Mr. Grist: On Sunday 28 October 1990 there was an incident at the waste disposal site at Rhymney, operated by Euromet Ltd. under a licence issued by Rhymney Valley district council. A chemical drum on the site ruptured, releasing a quantity of noxious vapour.

Officers of the Rhymney Valley district council attended the site that evening and the council which, as licensing authority is responsible for the supervision of the activities at the site, subsequently instructed its officers to take action to secure the removal of waste and drums from the site through exercise of its powers under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

The hon. Gentleman will know from my letter of 19 November that the Rhymney Valley district council is under a specific duty, as licensing authority, to ensure that the licensed activities at the site do not cause pollution of water or danger to public health or become seriously detrimental to the amenities of the locality. Our Department is continuing to keep in close touch with the council's response to this incident.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Secretary of State aware of the enormous resentment and bitterness in the Rhymney community at the fact that people can dump 6,500 drums of noxious waste in the community without any form of planning permission? Is he aware further that there is considerable resentment at the complacency shown by the Health and Safety Executive and other organisations in that respect? Will he therefore meet the fears and wishes of the Rhymney community by revoking the licence and financially assisting the local authority to clear the site?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman persists, as do others, in avoiding the fact that the matter is in the hands of the local authority. It is most disappointing that, when the Welsh Office has taken the side of local authorities in allowing them to continue to be responsible in such matters, as opposed to what is happening in England, difficulties of this kind occur which tend to undermine that position. It was up to the local authority, which in turn revoked the licence in part—it could have revoked it entirely and closed down the operation, but it chose not to do so—and there is now an appeal to the Welsh Office. The local authority again failed until 6 November to provide information on which the Welsh Office could decide the appeal.

Coal Industry

11. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet the chairman and directors of British Coal to discuss the future of the coal industry in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Shortly.

Mr. Davies: Does the Secretary of State realise that British Coal's latest announcement about the Betws

coalfield and mine means that it has now abandoned the west Wales anthracite coalfield? As west Wales anthracite coal has the lowest sulphur content of all coal west of the Ukraine, and as there is now the technology to develop it, does he agree that the board of British Coal has shown criminal incompetence and, frankly, an awful lack of imagination? If they had been workers, not directors, those concerned would have been sacked a long time ago.

Mr. Hunt: Against the background of my own personal concern for the coal industry in south Wales and as somebody who has been underground at Betws—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman should choose his words more wisely. I utterly reject the accusation that he made against British Coal. This is very much a matter for its commercial judgment.

South Wales Coalfield

12. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the number of jobs involved in *(a)* deep mining and *(b)* opencast mining in the south Wales coalfield.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of 3,200 in deep mining and 1,500 on opencast coal mining operations conducted by the British Coal opencast executive.

Mr. Williams: I noted the Secretary of State's comments to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) about his personal concern about jobs in coal mining. We in south Wales know only too well what that means. In the anthracite coalfield, from which we come, 3,000 jobs have been lost in the past five years, leaving just 100 jobs at Betws. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that British Coal's policy in our area of Dyfed seems to be very much for opencast coal mining, which is causing ever more environmental damage, and the sites of which are getting ever closer to large villages and communities? Will he ask British Coal to review its policy for the development of our high-quality, low-sulphur antracite resources?

Mr. Hunt: On the first point about deep coal mining, having been underground several times in south Wales, I know the geological problems—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Do not let us underestimate the geological problems that face south Wales miners, which have, in many ways, made their task supremely difficult. The question of opencast mining is very much a matter of reaching the right balance between environmental considerations on the one hand and the economic justification for that opencast coal on the other.

Mr. Coleman: I join my right hon. and hon. Friends in their condemnation of the National Coal Board in respect of the deep mining of anthracite. Can the Secretary of State put a figure on the profitability of opencast mining in south Wales over the past three years? Can he also put a figure on the amount of money, in terms of social benefits, that has been put into the communities that are afflicted with opencast mining?

Mr. Hunt: I shall readily supply the figures about the profitability of individual opencast or collective opencast operations, if the hon. Gentleman lets me have his detailed questions. British Coal and I should be glad to supply the figures. However, the important point is that while, on the one hand, there is an economic justification for opencast coal—often it is needed to be blended with deep-mined coal to make the coal acceptable to power stations—on the other hand, serious environmental implications must be taken into account. It is important to get the balance right.

Health Authorities

14. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with health authorities on their current financial situations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My officials and I have had many such discussions.

Mr. Griffiths: Would the Secretary of State like to explain why on 31 August the Minister of State wrote a letter to Dr. D. B. Powell of the Princess of Wales hospital in Bridgend stating that the Mid Glamorgan district health authority had underspent according to the figures provided up to 31 July, yet on 10 November the health authority reported in the press that it was £1·2 million overspent? Does he agree that that reflects the position throughout Wales? What does the Welsh Office intend to do about the underfunding of the health service in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should look at the facts and statistics when he refers to the underfunding of the health service in Wales. When this Government came to office in 1979, the amount spent on the health service in Wales was £481·5 million, and this year it was £1,540 million—more than treble. The financial allocation in Mid Glamorgan for 1978-89 was £49 million and this year the provisional recurring allocation is £160 million. There has been a substantial increase in cash terms and the hon. Gentleman should look at the facts and statistics before attempting to reach conclusions such as the one that he just made.

Hospital Waiting Lists

17. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he intends to announce on measures to reduce hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Grist: A number of initiatives to reduce waiting times and lists have already been successfully introduced at a cost of £6 million since 1986. As I told the hon. Gentleman on 29 October, I am currently considering what further means may be appropriate under the new arrangements for contracted health care from 1 April 1991.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister recall telling me in answer to a written parliamentary question that he did not know how many patients from Wales were currently being treated in hospitals outside Wales? As at least 3,000 beds are to be closed in the London district and elsewhere in England because of the Government's balance sheet first, patients last policy, how can he assess what will happen to patients on waiting lists in Wales next winter? Will it be a winter of waiting and suffering? Will he confirm or deny the speculation that his job is about to be ditched and that he is to be replaced by a representative of the loony right?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman started sensibly and finished foolishly. He will know that his health authority has been successful in reducing waiting times for urgent in and out-patients during the past 12 months. He should also be aware that calculations have been made about the flow of patients across borders, so that financing can be made available to cover that eventuality. He raised an interesting subject about the movement of patients, which is part of the contractual process to which I referred in my original answer.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Under-Secretary of State agree that one initiative that would cut hospital waiting lists would be to reject entirely the proposal submitted to him by South Glamorgan health authority to close six hospitals, three of them in my constituency? Does he further agree that he was expected to announce his decision on the matter on Friday 30 November, but has delayed his decision by several weeks? Is that a sign that we are to have the worst of all Christmas presents from the Secretary of State?

Mr. Grist: I think that the hon. Gentleman would wish to have a settlement as early as possible—although his last remark perhaps shows that he does not. He must appreciate that I cannot comment on what he said because the matter is under consideration.

Welsh Lamb Enterprise

18. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the percentage of Welsh sheep farmers who support Welsh Lamb Enterprise.

Mr. David Hunt: Forty-five per cent., which is not enough.

Mr. Raffan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and glad that he said that the percentage is not enough, because it is not. Will he do his utmost to impress upon the farming unions in Wales that far more sheep farmers must support Welsh Lamb Enterprise? If they want to market the product, they must support the scheme, believe far more in marketing, and do far more for marketing.

Mr. Hunt: Yes I shall, and I agree.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: I wholeheartedly endorse the fact that Welsh sheep farmers should look positively at marketing, but does not the Minister realise that the 30 per cent. cut in support prices could mean that up to a quarter of Welsh sheep farmers will go out of business? Does not he realise that he must stand up for Welsh farmers? Why does not he go to the EC negotiations and the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks, stand up for Welsh farmers and be like the Prime Minister—his own man in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman should not be overtaken by his own verbosity. I shall stand up for Welsh sheep farmers just as my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with the support of us all, stands up for the interests of Welsh farmers in Brussels.

The hon. Gentleman should not exaggerate the situation as he has done. The 30 per cent. figure does not mean a 30 per cent. cut in prices; it is a figure since 1986, not as from now, and it is important to stop any misleading comments that can only undermine confidence in the industry.

I am happy to have been able to authorise two advance payments of the sheep annual premium, which have meant an extra cash injection for sheep farmers in Wales of £25 million.

Roads (Expenditure)

20. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total spending by central Government on roads in Wales since 1979; and how many miles of motorway and trunk roads have been laid since that year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since 1979, total net spending by central Government on motorway and trunk roads in Wales has exceeded £1·2 billion. In addition, over £260 million of transport supplementary grant has been provided to Welsh local authorities for improvement of their roads. Twenty-two miles of motorway and 134 miles of trunk road have been completed. Seven schemes totalling 16 miles are under construction.

Mr. Knox: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the size of expenditure on roads in Wales since he became a Minister 11 and a half years ago? Can he say anything about work in progress on the north-south road?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that we have spent about £100 million since 1979 on improving the A470 north-south route; and we shall spend another £100 million on that same route. We have spent £50 million on the other north-south route, the A483, since 1979, and we shall spend a further £30 million in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. John P. Smith: What does the Minister intend to do to get away from the ludicrous problem of Wales's national airport being serviced by a single-carriageway road?

Sir Wyn Roberts: We are always considering the situation of the airport and we look forward to its further development. I have heard the hon. Gentleman talk about the problems of prosperity in his area and around the airport, but he will be aware that the road to the airport is a county road.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

City Fraud

28. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next expects to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss City fraud; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Primary responsibility for the prosecution of commercial fraud rests with the Serious Fraud Office. I expect to meet the director again shortly to discuss matters of departmental interest.

Mr. Skinner: What action is the Attorney-General taking on the sale of the National Bus Company—as reported by the National Audit Office—which was sold off by Government spivs at less than half price? Has not he learnt the lesson? We hear now that the regional electricity companies are being sold off for £5 billion when their asset value is more than £16 billion. What is all this talk about

a classless society? This is a casino society run by spivs like the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his friends in the Government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. To refer to an hon. Member as a spiv is not a parliamentary expression. Will the hon. Gentleman withdraw it?

Mr. Skinner: It is not in "Erskine May".

Mr. Speaker: It may not be, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw it.

Mr. Skinner: Government spivvery.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful that in this classless society the hon. Gentleman did not describe me as a first-class spiv or a spiv of any category. I think that the hon. Gentleman is confused. Privatisation is a case of the state wanting to divest itself of that which it no longer wants to hold. Fraudsters want to divest other people of what fraudsters want to hold. I am enjoying embarking on an area of responsibility that is not mine, but the hon. Gentleman overlooks the extreme popularity of the privatisation programme—he cannot forgive that.

Debt Cases

29. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to transfer the enforcement of cases against individuals involving debts of less than £25,000 from magistrates courts to county courts.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The rules for the enforcement of debts in the magistrates courts and the county courts are currently under study by the Law Commission, which expects to report in the early spring of next year.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Solicitor-General agree that there is no need to wait for that report? Under the present system and under the community charge or poll tax regulations, ordinary people can be dispossessed of their vital goods and essentials by private bailiffs as a result of liability orders dealt with by magistrates courts. Those private bailiffs are unqualified people, any Tom, Dick or Harry, and they could be thugs or have criminal records. Is not it about time that the regulations were changed so that county court qualified bailiffs could bring at least some professionalism into this dastardly business?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman will have read the National Consumer Council report, which I suspect lies behind his question. That report contains constructive suggestions. The council recognises that any question of transfer of all such debt collecting to the county courts is a long way down the road. The report makes constructive suggestions about monitoring and control of the present bailiffs who, after all, have been collecting the rates for a long time.

Prosecution Policy

30. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss prosecution policy.

The Attorney-General: I last met the Director on 9 November when we discussed a variety of matters of departmental interest. My right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General met him for the same purpose on 28 November.

Mr. Janner: Did the Attorney-General and the Director discuss the flood of racist and anti-Semitic material that has been coming through the post, the latest of which is entitled "Another 'Blood Libel' or Ritual Murder"? Why have there been no prosecutions for such matters since 1986? Is it because the law is too weak, in which case it should be changed, or is it because the Attorney-General and the Government do not wish to enforce it? It must be one or the other.

The Attorney-General: It is certainly not the latter, as the hon. and learned Gentleman knows perfectly well. The Law Officers and the Director of Public Prosecutions, for whom they are responsible, take extremely seriously the writing, publication and distribution of such odious material. In the past three years some 20 cases have been referred by the Board of Deputies of British Jews to the prosecuting authorities. In only seven of those cases has it been decided to bring no prosecutions, in each instance because there was insufficient evidence to justify proceedings. In the remaining cases police inquiries are outstanding, or have been unsuccessful, or the police have decided not to refer the case to the Crown prosecution service. There has been a considerable increase in that literature—to dignify it with that word—in the past year, and police inquiries are now outstanding in 16 cases.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that while the Government, with the support of the whole House, have put on the statute book legislation that was thought to be adequate for the prosecution of racial offences, it is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions, who is not a member of the Government, to decide whether there is sufficient evidence in a particular case to initiate a prosecution?

The Attorney-General: I agree. It would be damaging to bring a prosecution that was outside the criteria that are applied by the DPP to every other case and which failed. As the bona fides of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Law Officers have been called into question, I am entitled to remind the House of a letter from the acting Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir John Dellow, in *The Times* last week. He said:

"I know that due and proper consideration is given and cases prosecuted where there is a sufficiency of evidence."

Mr. John Morris: Will the Attorney-General discuss with the Director progress on the hearing of the appeal by the Birmingham Six? While the Crown and the defence must have adequate time to prepare their cases——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This would be more appropriate on Question 31, the next question.

Mr. Morris: I am putting a general question about the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. and learned Member is encroaching on the next question, but go on.

Mr. Morris: Will the Attorney-General convey to the Lord Chancellor the need for an expedited hearing when the cases are ready?

The Attorney-General: I can say that as soon as the grounds of appeal of the six appellants are lodged and the Crown has had an opportunity to consider them, the case can be expected to be listed, but listing is a matter for the court authorities.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the inability to prosecute those responsible for some of the offensive literature to which the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) referred underlines the need for a change in the law?

The Attorney-General: That is arguable, but it would be difficult, as those of us who laboured over what is now the Public Order Act 1986 and previous legislation will remember, to incorporate such provisions in the 1986 Act. It is difficult to put into statutory language the sort of criteria that perhaps my hon. Friend and others wish to see in legislation. The relevant legislation is pretty comprehensive and my hon. Friend will recall its terms. In a substantial proportion of the outstanding cases that have been referred by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the police have been unable to identify any individual who was responsible for writing the material, distributing it or publishing it.

Commonhold

33. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to bring forward legislation on the proposals of the working group on commonhold.

The Solicitor-General: The Government published "Commonhold—a Consultation Paper" on Wednesday 28 November. The Command Paper includes a draft Bill and in part IV a series of questions on which the Government are seeking views.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the question relates to a group of leaseholders that has been especially disadvantaged in recent years? Will he hurry forward his consultation and, I hope, his implementation of the recommendations of the working party?

The Solicitor-General: I know of the close interest that my hon. Friend has taken in that matter over many years, along with other of my hon. Friends. If he can make constructive suggestions to deal with one or two rather knotty issues that are raised in the consultation paper, I am sure that that will help hurry the matter forward.

Hillsborough Victims Support Group

34. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to meet the Hillsborough disaster victims support group; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No. I have written to the organiser of the petition presented by the Hillsborough families support group.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the major concerns of the group about the need for justice. Is he further aware that I appreciate that he recently wrote to me to express his views on the matter, which I shall convey to the group? I should be grateful if he ensured that in all respects the families of those who died at Hillsborough got justice. That is what concerns them above all.

The Attorney-General: No one has more faithfully represented those whom my hon. Friend mentioned than he has. Every one of the interests and concerns that he mentioned is extremely important and deserves to be taken with every seriousness.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Mozambique

36. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government propose to make any additional aid available to Mozambique.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): We have a substantial programme of assistance for Mozambique, which we aim to continue. Gross bilateral aid flows in 1989 totalled over £22 million. For the international relief effort we have this year pledged 10,000 tonnes of food aid and £3·5 million of other relief assistance, plus a further £3 million in support of Mozambique refugees in neighbouring countries. We shall continue to do what we can to assist.

Mr. Pike: Despite what the Minister said, I am sure that she is aware of the case that was made recently by Oxfam, which underlined the urgent and appalling situation in Mozambique, on which I reported following my brief visit to Mozambique earlier this year. I am sure that we all look forward to the end of the civil war in that country. Will the Minister now take steps to increase aid before further people die unnecessarily in Mozambique?

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have not been ungenerous to Mozambique. We have always said that what we needed above all was a ceasefire. We warmly welcome the agreement arrived at in Rome on Saturday, under which the Government of Mozambique and Renamo have agreed to concentrate Zimbabwean troops in the Beira and Limpopo corridors. We believe that that could lead to a general ceasefire and a political settlement. We shall do all that we can from outside to help in that. When peace is restored, we can review the general rehabilitation that we know is needed in Mozambique. I hope before long to be able to go there again to make an assessment of some of the things that are needed.

Mr. Wells: Should not my right hon. Friend be congratulated on being very generous with British aid money to Mozambique, including the restoration of Beira port and the railway line to Zimbabwe? Is it true that she has received the grateful thanks of the Mozambique Government for all that she has been doing?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. The Mozambique Government are most grateful for the work that we have done—which my hon. Friend described—and for the work being done by the Portia port services in Maputo port. The Mozambique Government have also done well in keeping to the targets for economic and social rehabilitation, which is why we are continuing our support. At the meeting of the consultative group on Mozambique to be held in Paris next week, we shall decide

what more should be done. I remind the House that more than £50 million of programme aid commitment has been spent in Mozambique since 1985, and that is additional to the emergency aid that has totalled more than £55 million since 1987.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is not the Minister's failure to obtain additional aid for Mozambique an example of the invidious position in which the Overseas Development Administration finds itself as just a junior arm of the Foreign Office? If the ODA were to carry a Cabinet post, the right hon. Lady could sit at the Government table arguing with the Treasury for additional money for the ODA. Given her obvious merits, why did she not fight tooth and nail for a seat in the Cabinet? Has not she let down the women——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is rather wide of Mozambique.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is not it true that, had the right hon. Lady obtained additional money for Mozambique because she was a member of the Cabinet, she would not have let down women throughout the country, including those who want additional resources for overseas development?

Mrs. Chalker: I have been pleased to obtain additional resources for the overseas aid programme and I shall concentrate on doing that. That is why I wish to be single-minded about my task. I have had no row, of any sort, either with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister or with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten). That suggestion is a fiction created by the media and assisted by the hon. Lady.

Britain has done reasonably well by Mozambique. However, in our project aid and our technical co-operation, we have sought to give it practical help at a time when civil war has been raging. I am delighted to continue with that vital work for Mozambique, for the remainder of the developing world and for eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe

37. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress the Minister for Overseas Development was able to detect during her recent visit to the three know-how fund countries of central and eastern Europe on the transition in these countries to a free market economy.

Mrs. Chalker: Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have already made considerable progress in coping with the enormous challenges that they face. We shall continue to help them, targeting our assistance on privatisation, financial services, management and other aspects of the creation of a market economy.

Mr. Field: Will my right hon. Friend consider modest funding for the Polish Resettlement Act 1947, which has never been repealed? That would assist Polish citizens who so wished to return to their country, taking with them the considerable wisdom and experience that they have gained from living in one of the most dynamic economies and democracies in Europe.

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for that suggestion. I know that the Act was designed to meet a highly specific and now historic need. The present position is very different and I shall consider what my hon. Friend said. I believe that British residents of Polish origin are not only very happy living here, but very happy with their involvement in the rehabilitation of Poland, including some who are assisted through the know-how fund.

Mr. Canavan: I do not begrudge the assistance given to eastern Europe, but will the Minister give an assurance that it is not simply a transfer of resources that would otherwise assist developing countries in the third world?

Mrs. Chalker: Yes, Sir.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the wide-ranging ministerial expertise that she brings to her current portfolio and on the shining example of intellectual rigour and first-class work that she gives us all——

Hon. Members: Reading.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Miss Nicholson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is the United Kingdom's expertise that is changing the economies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and that it is British input—with the London School of Economics arguing about competition, as opposed to Harvard arguing about ownership—that will ensure that those countries' economies will really bowl forward?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks. I was privileged to see implemented at the unique Tonsil factory in western Poland—one of the first to be privatised—the know-how that my hon. Friend described. I was impressed also by the attitude shown by the works council towards its involvement. We should congratulate the Polish Government on publishing last Friday details of their first five privatisations; that development also is receiving considerable help from British know-how.

The Gulf

39. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made an assessment of the impact of the Gulf crisis on developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The effect will vary widely from country to country and any complete assessment is complicated because of uncertainty of future oil prices. But our tentative assessments, and those of the World bank, suggest that over a full year, many developing countries could suffer direct losses of about 2 per cent. of gross domestic product. A few will be much worse hit. Against that, oil-exporting developing countries will gain—some of them very substantially.

Ms. Primarolo: None of us would begrudge aid to any area in the middle east during the crisis. Britain's contribution has taken another £60 million out of its overseas development aid budget, with no hope of compensation. As to the crippling effect on developing economies of rising oil prices, does the Minister accept that article 50 of the United Nations charter provides for such countries to receive international compensation, but that no money is currently available? If the right hon. Lady had a seat in the Cabinet, could not she put her full force behind the argument for establishing a fund to compensate developing economies that will otherwise be crippled?

Mrs. Chalker: The resources for eastern Europe are quite separate from those for the developing world, formerly known as the third world. It is clear from our discussions with the International Monetary Fund and the World bank that we shall be able to help many of the countries that have been hit. However, even more important is the agreement that we seek on debt relief, from which some of the worst affected countries could benefit significantly. I refer to the Trinidad terms put forward by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—which I hope all countries will support, as they will help nations in need.

Iraq (Talks)

3.32 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards President Bush's invitation to Iraq for talks on the Gulf crisis.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I begin with an apology. Unhappily, I have lost my voice, so I am somewhat less audible than I would wish to be.

We welcome the United States initiative, which is designed to increase the peaceful pressures on Iraq and to reinforce the need for compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions. As President Bush and Secretary Baker have made clear, the purpose is not to negotiate with Iraq. It is rather to leave the Iraqi leadership in no doubt as to the determination of the international community to see Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait in accordance with the requirements laid down by the United Nations.

Mr. Kaufman: The Opposition also welcome President Bush's initiative, as an imaginative attempt to solve the crisis peacefully.

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House whether the British Government were consulted in advance by President Bush, and if so when, and can he say whether the United Kingdom Government will take part in the talks? Will he confirm that the 12 United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Gulf crisis stand and cannot deviate? Will he also confirm that these resolutions require Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from the whole of Kuwait, and the unconditional release of all hostages? Will he further confirm that resolution 660, which was passed on 2 August and has been reaffirmed many times since, calls upon Iraq and Kuwait to begin immediate intensive negotiations for the resolution of their differences, and that such negotiations can begin once the UN Security Council resolutions on withdrawal and the release of hostages have been implemented?

Will the Minister further confirm that, once the Security Council resolutions requiring withdrawal and release of hostages have been carried out, the way will be clear for the international conference on the middle east for which the Labour and Conservative parties in this country have been calling for many years? Will he agree that that conference can deal with self-determination for the Palestinians, resettlement of Palestinian refugees, Israeli security, a peace settlement in the middle east and the withdrawal of foreign forces, removal of all non-conventional armaments from the middle east and control of arms sales to the region. Will he point out that all these great prizes are open for discussion as soon as the Security Council resolutions are implemented?

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman send President Bush the good wishes of the House for the success of his initiative, and a peaceful resolution of the crisis on the basis of the Security Council resolutions?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support. On his first question, we were indeed given notice of what occurred. On his second question, the 12 resolutions are still in place. On his third question, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to go to Iraq.

On the other resolutions, the position is quite plain. The United Nations resolutions require Iraq to leave Kuwait unconditionally, to release the hostages, and to restore the legitimate Government of Kuwait. Once that has happened, and not until then, there is some unfinished business which can be addressed, one aspect of which is the Palestinian question. I make it plain to the House that we see no linkage between the two.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will my hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the fact that many of us share the misgivings about the latest development that Mr. Henry Kissinger expressed yesterday, and that we would be very concerned indeed, even if Iraq were to withdraw from Kuwait, if Saddam Hussein were left in possession of chemical and biological weapons, and possibly the capacity to produce nuclear weapons and to deliver them, as I have been told, to areas as far afield as Sicily?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's misgivings. On his central question, by the invitation that he has extended, President Bush seeks to make it wholly plain to Saddam Hussein that the resolutions mean precisely what they say—that he must comply unconditionally with the resolutions by 15 January or face the possibility of being driven out of Kuwait by force. This is not a process of negotiation. It is a desire to make it plain to Saddam Hussein, so that he understands the position without any doubt or equivocation.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Minister aware that the talks—which have been requested urgently from the outset by people all over the world—will receive a warm welcome? Is he aware that the pressure for them to take place was primarily a result of the worldwide campaign for a peaceful solution on the basis of implementation of all the United Nations resolutions, including that applying to the west bank and Gaza? This has been prompted by the catastrophe of war which is becoming apparent all over the world, not least in the United States.

Does the Minister agree that the Government have no moral right to commit our troops to battle, or to put at risk the lives of 1,400 British citizens in Iraq and Kuwait, without the explicit consent of the House of Commons? That has been urged strongly in the United States—under its own constitutional provisions—but ought, on moral grounds, to apply in the United Kingdom as well.

Mr. Hogg: It is, of course, very important that there should be no misunderstanding of the nature or purpose of the talks. The purpose of the invitation issued by President Bush is to ensure that Saddam Hussein understands clearly that he must comply, fully and unconditionally, with the United Nations Security Council resolutions; and that, if he does not do so, he faces the risk of being driven out of Kuwait by force.

As for the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, the Labour and Conservative Front Benches share a common stance. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman is unable to support his own Front Bench on this matter.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): I welcome what my hon. and learned Friend has said this afternoon, especially

[Mr. Robert Hayward]

in relation to the gesture of good will made by President Bush. Will my hon. and learned Friend emphasise that the greatest gesture that President Hussein could make would be immediately to release all hostages of all nationalities? Will he also convey the message that it is not appropriate —in saying this I make no criticism of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—for President Hussein to release hostages to one emissary when he has announced that he will release the same group of people to a previous British emissary—my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)? President Hussein is currently claiming credit twice over.

Mr. Hogg: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and indeed to his family support group, for the work that they have collectively done; it has been of great value to families and hostages.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's substantive point. The detention of hostages by Saddam Hussein is a wicked and immoral act. It is also contrary to international law. He should release them forthwith.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) asked whether there had been prior consultation. If so, when was it—or were the Government notified only a few minutes before the talks?

Mr. Hogg: We were informed of the impending announcement before the announcement.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): May I thank my hon. and learned Friend—or, rather, Her Majesty's Government —for standing firm against any linkage with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute? Does he agree that, if Saddam Hussein were to withdraw because any linkage had been conceded, not only would he be being rewarded for his infamy, blackmail and slaughter of Kuwait, but the chances of a nuclear conflict that would result in the deaths of many thousands of people would be much enhanced?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend. There is no linkage. It would be absurd to say that the solution to a problem that had recently developed must be postponed until the resolution of a long-standing and intractable problem. Let me add, however, that, once the UN Security Council resolutions have been complied with in full by Iraq, there will be unfinished business—and that unfinished business includes a serious attempt to resolve the Palestinian problem.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Do the Government believe the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who told us that the Kuwaiti oilfields are deep mined by the Iraqis? What technical information is available to the Government about the effect of the detonation of oilfields by deep mines? Do the Government dispute that the sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide consequences could travel 750 km or more from the area in which the oilfields were blown up? There is talk about the military options. What assessment has been made of the ecological, quite apart from the human, consequences?

Mr. Hogg: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that war is a bloody and beastly business which one should avoid if at all possible, I entirely agree with him. The British Government's position, and that of the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen, is plain: we wish to avoid war. We hope very much that Iraq will comply with the Security Council resolutions by 15 January. If it does, there will be no war. Otherwise, Iraq faces the possibility of being driven out of Kuwait by force.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Has my hon. and learned Friend reflected on the fact that, had Israel not acted in 1981, our armed forces would be facing a nuclear-armed opponent? Whether or not Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait, what should we be doing to deal with Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological warfare capabilities?

Mr. Hogg: The first thing to do is to secure unconditional compliance with the Security Council resolutions.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Many of us will support military conflict, if it is necessary, but as a position of last resort. Is there not a position of first resort? Ought not the Government discreetly try to exert pressure on Mr. Bush to widen Mr. Baker's remit so as to hold discussions on matters that might lead to an end of the crisis, or are we simply going to lull ourselves into war without considering the consequences?

Mr. Hogg: Neither the American Government nor Her Majesty's Government, or any other Government involved in the matter, regard war as being a position of first resort. As I have just said, it is a beastly and bloody business which one should avoid if at all possible. It is also, however, true that Iraq has invaded its neighbours, killed its citizens and stolen its property. Iraq must now comply with the Security Council resolutions. It has a further six weeks in which to do that. It has plenty of time. If Iraq does not do so, at the expiration of that time it faces the risk of war.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that many of us have been saddened by the appeasers' road to Baghdad that has been taken by some right hon. Members and by other spent volcanos of so-called leaders in Europe? Is it not time for us to say that what President Bush is really saying is that he is willing to give peace one more chance to stop bloodshed, but that what he is not willing to do is to give way on the fact that Kuwait has to be free? If Kuwait is not free, Saudi Arabia, the whole middle east and possibly the whole world could be involved in war. Is that not where we stand—for freedom and justice, not for appeasement?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend puts his point robustly, as is his wont. The purpose of the invitation is to ensure that Saddam Hussein learns for himself that the United States and her allies will carry the military burden of this business, if it needs to be carried. We are determined to do what has to be done to ensure full compliance with the Security Council resolutions. At the same time, we are anxious to avoid war if at all possible. Therefore, the invitation is designed to make sure that there is no misunderstanding on the part of Saddam Hussein.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): If the Bush initiative is not successful and hostilities break out in the Gulf, does the Minister accept that many thousands of British citizens working in other Arab countries could face

some difficulties from local groups hostile to the west and sympathetic to Iraq? Does he accept that one group of people who could be placed in some jeopardy are British lecturers and teachers in Arab universities? Will he consider instructing British ambassadors to seek assurances from other Arab countries that their welfare, property and lives will be safeguarded in those circumstances?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and relevant point. We are urgently considering how best to ensure the safety of British citizens in the middle east.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question and that we are to have a statement after it. I shall call two more Members from each side, but then we must move on.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My hon. and learned Friend alluded to the possibility of unfinished business being on the agenda of a middle east conference in the event of an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Will he comment on the Government's view of the statement made today by the Israeli Government that President Saddam Hussein should withdraw from office?

Mr. Hogg: It would be a very good thing if he withdrew from office. It would be an even better thing if he withdrew from Kuwait.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The link between the situation in Kuwait and that of the Palestinians is not Saddam Hussein but international law, which is being breached in both instances. We must take a firm stand on the settlement of the Palestinian question, because that is the way to make the middle east safe. Our Government have behaved like a poodle for the United States. To achieve a proper settlement, we need a separate European initiative in which European Governments are not implicated in backing the intransigence of Israel in the middle east. That includes not only an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait but a long-term peaceful settlement in the middle east rather than a horrific war.

Mr. Hogg: There is neither logic nor morality in arguing that there is some link between resolution of the Palestinian question and securing the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Once Iraq has unconditionally complied with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, we will return to the unfinished business that has been discussed in the Chamber today.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that we are doing our utmost to stop sanction breaking, which many newspapers are reporting is happening in some areas? Also, will he give succour to the families of hostages that a financial lifeline will be supplied by the Government in the event of their being unable to make mortgage and other payments, which, as we approach Christmas, could cripple families?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the plight of the hostages. I have considerable admiration for the courage and fortitude shown by the families of the hostages. I am glad to say that we have been able to do much to assist them. We have close contacts with them, not least through the family support group, with which my hon. Friend is closely associated.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): May I underscore the plea that has just been made on behalf of the hostages? May we have an assurance that, in this welcome initiative, the Government will stress to the President of the United States the need to put them at the top of the agenda? As the Minister rightly made it clear that the United Nations resolutions will be adhered to and will be stressed by the President, the word "negotiation" will not be appropriate in the context of the meeting, but what status does the Minister foresee for the meeting? Does he regard it as a dialogue or an opportunity for the position of the United Nations to be rehearsed directly to President Hussein?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to emphasise the great importance that the Government attach to the early release of the hostages, and we have made that plain on every possible occasion. The hon. Gentleman referred to the invitation from the United States Government. I agree with him that to use the word "negotiations" is misleading. The purpose of the invitation is to make plain to Iraq the fact that the Security Council is intent on securing full compliance with the resolution and that those countries that have deployed forces in the middle east stand behind that resolution. If Iraq does not comply unconditionally with the terms of the resolution, that country will be exposed to the risk of war, and Saddam Hussein needs to understand that.

Iraq (Exports)

3.55 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): With permission I should like to make a statement about exports to Iraq.

The Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1987 specified the goods the export of which would require a licence from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in 1988. The export of any military equipment required a licence. The order specified a range of equipment that is capable of being used for either military or civil purposes which also required a licence. Decisions on export licences applications are taken on a case-by-case basis.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the then Foreign Secretary, set out the guidelines applying to exports of defence equipment to Iraq in a written answer on 29 October 1985, at column *450* of *Hansard*. Those guidelines state that we should maintain our consistent refusal to supply any lethal equipment and that, subject to that overriding consideration, we should attempt to fulfil existing contracts and obligations. However, the guidelines said that we should not in future approve orders for any defence equipment which, in our view, would significantly enhance the capability of Iran or Iraq to prolong or exacerbate the conflict between them.

It is clear whether or not most goods fall within the guidelines. There is, however, a range of equipment—particularly machine tools—which could have either a civil or military use and for which a licence will be required.

When appropriate, both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry if Defence are consulted before a decision is made by my Department on whether a licence will be granted.

Applications for export licences are made on a form that requires the exporter to state both the customer and a description of the equipment. It is normal practice for it to be emphasised to those applying for licences that they should make clear the purpose for which the equipment is to be used.

In early 1988, following representations from a number of hon. Members on both sides, of the House, my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, the then Minister for Trade, agreed to meet the Machine Tool Technologies Association to discuss the application of the guidelines in relation to the export of machine tools to Iraq.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement strongly denies the interpretation put on the remarks alleged to have been made by him in *The Sunday Times* article. I will not comment on the record of the meeting kept by the MTTA, which was not sent to my Department at the time, as I am advised that to do so might prejudice possible proceedings.

As the House will be aware, some matters concerning the licences granted to Matrix Churchill and the exports carried out by that firm to Iraq are now the subject of investigation by Customs and Excise. These investigations are carried out by Customs and Excise under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. It would therefore be improper for me to comment on those matters or to say anything that might prejudice any proceedings.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): That insignificant statement will surprise and satisfy no one. It will certainly not satisfy the readers and reporters of *The Sunday Times*. It will not satisfy the arms manufacturers who were first encouraged to sell arms to Iraq and who now have the possibility of prosecution hanging over them. It will not even satisfy the Minister for Defence Procurement over his role in this sorry affair.

Perhaps the Minister will confirm that there have been arms sales to Iraq, involving battlefield radar supplied by Thorn/EMI, tank-tracking equipment supplied by Bimec Industries, engineering equipment for mortar shells supplied by Wickman Bennett, as well as many parts of the so-called supergun which required explosive retardants and which got through the gap.

Will the Minister say more about the status of the meeting that took place on 20 January 1988 between the then Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), and representatives of the Machine Tool Technologies Association? Did the then Minister advise them about filling in forms? Did he tell them to couch their applications in a manner designed to emphasise—and therefore by implication to mislead the other Departments—the peaceful aspects of the deals? Did he warn them of the need for speed to avoid bureaucratic—Foreign Office—interference because of external, namely United States, considerations?

Does the Parliamentary Under-Secretary appreciate that his totally inadequate explanation and his spurious distinction between lethal and non-lethal equipment make a mockery of the explicit instructions set out in December 1984 and the guidelines announced by the then Foreign Secretary on 29 October 1985? Is he aware that those statements were reinforced by the then Prime Minister on 10 November 1989 when she said, in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours):

"supplies of British defence equipment to Iraq and Iran continue to be governed by the guidelines introduced in 1985,"—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1989; Vol. 159, *c. 800.*]

Does the Parliamentary Under-Secretary not appreciate that the casuistry of those concerned will continue to be exposed and that the Government will not get away with selling what, if it is only the straw, is the straw with which the Iraqis are making the bricks which will be built up against our troops in the Gulf if it ever comes to action? Does he realise that, if people have been distorting, bending and falsifying the rules and hiding behind commercial constraints when they choose to ignore questions from hon. Members, they will be found out and the wrath of the British people will be heaped on them as a consequence?

Mr. Sainsbury *rose*——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot know whether it is a point of order until I have heard it.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said that the statement would not satisfy the readers of the *Sunday Times*. Is it not——

Mr. Speaker: No. That is not a point of order; it is a point of argument.

Mr. Sainsbury: When I was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement I occasionally had opportunities to debate with the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). I recall that he was very hard to satisfy. However good the news one announced, he would find cause to criticise it. Just for the record, may I say that I have moved on and I am now Minister for Trade, not a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan is an Opposition Defence spokesman and he is perhaps not as familiar with the procedures for export licensing as he might be were he Opposition spokesman on Trade and Industry matters. It is the exporter's responsibility to provide information to the Department which will enable the department with responsibility for issuing licences to determine whether the equipment concerned qualifies for a licence.

The guidelines to which the hon. Gentleman referred are clear. They were set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) on 29 October 1985, and since then they have been scrupulously and carefully followed in the issuing of licences. No other country has such a careful method for scrutinising applications for export licences and for controlling exports.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be unwise for hon. Members to pursue a witch hunt in a vacuum when we do not know the facts? If any firm has deliberately broken the rules, it will be prosecuted by the proper authorities. We should not have a witch hunt against many firms which, over the years, with the best of good will, have genuinely tried to maximise their exports for the good of the country.

Mr. Sainsbury: I agree that it would be most unwise for any of us to make statements or allegations which might prejudice the outcome of proceedings. Surely it would be in the interests of both sides of the House that, if proceedings are brought, they are not frustrated by comments made in the House.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Minister aware that his statement will not satisfy most hon. Members and that it will certainly not satisfy public opinion? Is he aware that the most serious allegations have been made that, in the months and years leading up to the invasion of 2 August, there were exports to Iraq which helped to build that country's war machine and that there was much complacency on the part of the Government and on the part of the Minister who was named in *The Sunday Times* report? Does the Minister really believe that his feeble excuses today will satisfy the House and the country?

Mr. Sainsbury: When it comes to being hard to satisfy, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) is certainly put in the shade by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). The exports to Iraq in the period to which the hon. Gentleman referred were made strictly in accordance with the criteria to which I have referred. I hope that the hon. Gentleman heard what they were. They barred the export of lethal equipment or equipment that would significantly enhance the capability of Iraq or Iran to carry on their conflict.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My hon. Friend mentioned that he had received representations from both sides of the House. Would he care to elaborate a little on the role of the Labour party?

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall have to write to my hon. Friend to let him know the full list of hon. Members who wrote to my predecessor seeking meetings on behalf of the Machine Tool Technologies Association. I assure my hon. Friend that the meeting that took place and which was referred to in the article in *The Sunday Times* arose as a result of those representations.

Mr. Ted Garrett (Walsend): I must declare two interests. First, I am a member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and, secondly, since 1968, I have advised the Machine Tool Technologies Association. Many members of my union worked on the machines that are now in Iraq and they would deeply resent any imputation that they were guilty of helping Iraq to protect —*[Interruption.]* Let me have my say.

It is wrong to pillory the management of the machine tool industry—men who have served their apprenticeships, gone through the ranks and worked to produce exports for the industry and for the country—to the extent that the Minister alleges that they might face charges in court. The Minister should state clearly that it is a tale of confusion between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Customs and Excise. None of them has got its act together, and that is why the article appeared in the "Insight" column of *The Sunday Times*. It is wrong for there to be public recrimination on an issue which the Government should admit would not have come forward had there been co-ordination in their activities and information to the machine tool industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Member is a strong supporter of the machine tools industry. It is a significant industry, with a good export record, and it provides much employment. I do not wish to comment on the matters to which the hon. Gentleman has referred because—I apologise to hon. Members for it and hope that they understand—I must fall back on saying that it would not be proper to comment on matters that are currently subject to investigation under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Does my hon. Friend recall that, during the Iran-Iraq conflict, when a company in my constituency wanted to supply engines for recovery vehicles, the application went to a Cabinet sub-committee and was declined in case the engines could be put to military use? Is that not a clear example of the Government abiding by the regulations? Bearing in mind what the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) has said, it will come as a great surprise to the House that the Liberal Democrat and Labour parties are attacking the machine tools industry in this way—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not true."] That has to be the case, despite Opposition Members' protests. If exporters are misleading a Government Department, that is a matter for the courts, not for the bear garden of Opposition Members.

Mr. Sainsbury: I do not remember the particular application to which my hon. Friend refers. I believe that it would have come before one of my predecessors. However, I can confirm, as I have done already, that there

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were guidelines which were well known to both exporters and the House. I can assure the House that those guidelines were scrupulously followed and that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, when appropriate, were consulted before my Department issued or refused a licence application.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Does the Minister accept that his statement is nothing less than a Sir Humphrey classic in its desire to obscure, confuse and cloud the issues? While accepting that he does not want to prejudice possible legal proceedings, surely the best way not to do so is to come forward this afternoon with the fullest possible disclosure of the facts, but that is what the hon. Gentleman has singularly failed to do. Why was not a minute of the meeting between the association and the Minister, to which he referred in his statement, not sent to his Department, given that his Department would then have been responsible for the granting of subsequent licences arising from the context of the discussions at that meeting? Is it not a ludicrous failure in the civil service, where the Government are policing their own policy?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I said in my statement, it would not be right for me to comment on the record that was kept of the meeting by the Machine Tool Technologies Association. I am advised that to do so might prejudice possible proceedings. I realise that the hon. Gentleman finds that unsatisfactory, but when he asks me to come to the House to make the fullest possible statement, he is asking me to do just that—to make a statement that would prejudice possible proceedings, and that I do not intend to do.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it proper for the Minister to claim sub judice when no proceedings have been started, which is what he has been doing throughout?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did not hear the Minister claim sub judice—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did."] Well, it is up to him how he answers the question. The case is not sub judice, and I did not hear him claim that it was.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Is not one of the differences between Iraq and this country the fact that a newspaper here can raise such issues? Is not one of the differences between this country and Iraq the fact that Parliament can respond to it? Is not one of the differences between Iraq and this country the fact that the trade association or *The Sunday Times* could publish the whole of the note that was made by the trade association, so that the rest of the House can make either the same judgment as the newspaper or a different one?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend draws attention to what some of us would regard as the less important differences between our country and Iraq. I rank human rights as the most important. However, these are significant differences, and my hon. Friend makes a good point.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Leaving aside how British troops in the Gulf must now feel towards the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), and the fact that the occasion of this statement is not only a good occasion for his resignation but another good reason for not drifting senselessly towards war in the Gulf, how can this Minister now face the 89 workers and their families from Matrix Churchill in Coventry who this weekend were given notice of their redundancy, which will take effect four weeks today? The Minister seems to have done nothing in the five weeks since I led a deputation of workers to him in his office. Is it not a fact that his Department encouraged general exports to Iraq, including machine tools and lathes from Matrix Churchill and Wickman Bennett?

Is it not a fact that in November 1988 the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced £400 million in credit to enable those exports to be made and that 10 days before the present Secretary of State for Health said in the House that the Iraqis were using chemical weapons to bomb the Kurds? Is it not a fact that the Department allowed the Iraqi secret service to take over Matrix Churchill? Is it not also a fact that, after sanctions were imposed in August, the Government washed their hands of the responsibility for workers in Coventry and elsewhere? As it is all the Government's responsibility, should not the Minister announce today that the Government will take over the firm, take it out of the hands of the Iraqi secret service, and guarantee the jobs and livelihoods of the workers in Coventry and elsewhere?

Mr. Sainsbury: Job losses and redundancies are always a matter for regret and I am sorry to hear what the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) said about some of the workers in Matrix Churchill. The hon. Gentleman read out a list of "facts", most of which I did not recognise as facts.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will my hon. Friend pay attention to the wise words of the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), and not the synthetic row being artificially created by the main Opposition? Does he agree that the gist of the Opposition's argument seems to be that any type of export from this country could conceivably, some day, somehow, be used for aggressive purposes and that their main accusation against my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement is that he did his best, within the law, to promote British trading interests? Will the Minister confirm that British policy on lethal weapons has not and will not change?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can confirm that our general policy has not changed and that our policy on the export of military equipment and arms to Iran and Iraq was clear and has been adhered to. The most that we can do at any time is to make the most informed, cautious and considered judgments in the light of all the information available. I doubt whether any other country has a more comprehensive and rigorously enforced system of defence export control.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Minister accept that it is the Government, not the machine tool industry, who are in the dock today? Were any private officials present at the meeting between the Minister and the Machine Tool Technologies Association? If there were, does their minute of that meeting coincide with the minutes published this weekend in *The Sunday Times?*

Mr. Sainsbury: I can confirm that it was a normal meeting and officials were present, as normal. The hon. Gentleman asked who was in the dock. Nobody is in the dock, and it is important to keep that in mind. I am not

prepared to make statements that might prejudice any proceedings that may be brought because, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, Customs and Excise is at present investigating certain matters, as I said in my statement. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would recognise that it would be unwise to make statements that might prejudice any proceedings arising from those investigations.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The Minister has admitted that, as one would expect, his officials were present at the meeting. Is it not a fact that the Department's normal practice is to keep its own minutes of such meetings? Has he not said that the meeting was not of a confidential nature but was to clarify already published guidelines to industry, so there was no secrecy in relation to the meeting or the minutes? How do his Department's minutes differ from those of the trade association?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that I made it clear to the House that the meeting was not to discuss any specific licence application but was held with the trade association to discuss the application of the guidelines in relation to the export of machine tools to Iraq. We seem to be talking about two entirely different issues.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that, in the cut and thrust of politics, we are all used to saying things about each other as a matter of course, but for Opposition Members to suggest that for some sordid reason, my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement would be willing to put British lives at risk for his personal interest is unworthy of them? Right from the word go, the Labour case has been that this will not satisfy readers of *The Sunday Times*. Nothing will satisfy *The Sunday Times* short of seeing blood on the sword.

This House needs to state clearly that we do not believe that any member of Her Majesty's Government, Labour or Conservative, would ever sell the people down the river. I would not—*[Interruption.]*—I would not believe that of a Labour Minister or of a colleague. Surely none of us should laugh at the honour of our people. Accusing the Minister of knowingly selling arms to an enemy of this country is something of which the Opposition should be thoroughly ashamed.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks and for his reminder that in the heat of the moment things may be said about hon. Members which perhaps should not be said. In the Department of Trade and Industry we endeavour both to promote exports and to stay strictly within the clear guidelines controlling defence exports.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): It ill becomes the Conservative party to engage in self-righteous indignation merely because hon. Members are honourably questioning certain events and want to know the truth. We know from long experience that war is terrible but also that it is terribly profitable to some people. If we admitted that we supported Saddam Hussein throughout the war against Iran, that might clear the air a bit.

The Minister above all people should understand this: he comes of a family that understands trading. I do not impute any ill motives to him. Only recently we were found to be clearly guilty, and I told the Prime Minister that she did not seem to understand the difference between a gun barrel and an oil pipe. We were found to be exporting gun barrels to Iraq, so why do Conservative members quibble about our honourable anxiety about what is going on?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman was slightly short on specific questions, but he seemed to suggest that we had exported lethal equipment and supported Iraq by so doing. I assure him that we have not been exporting lethal equipment. I remind him that it is the responsibility of the exporter to fill in the export licence application form, and to state, under C5, the

"nature of the ultimate user's business",

and, under C6, the

"precise purpose for which the goods are to be used".

If that information is not accurate, wrong decisions can be reached.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my hon. Friend share my confusion about the message that seems to be coming from the Opposition? Does he agree that, like it or not, the manufacture and export of military equipment and of equipment that could have some military application are important to this country? Does he recall that, in a constituency manifestation and in a previous manifestation as a Minister, I have received vigorous representations from trade union leaders who are anxious that the scrupulous attention paid by the Government to the purpose of exports should come down on the side of the workers and their unions? Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that scrupulous tests are applied and that there does not seem to have been any impropriety in this matter?

Mr. Sainsbury: I entirely agree. It is incumbent on any country with defence exports to ensure that there are strict controls and that they are well enforced. As my hon. Friend well knows, all countries have the right to self defence. Under article 51 of the United Nations charter, they are free to acquire defence equipment, and in many cases it would be a gross waste of resources if they tried to provide their own. The defence export industry is important and provides employment for at least 100,000 people. We should be careful in criticising it as if any defence export were wrong.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a fairly heavy day, with two Second Reading debates. I shall call four more hon. Members and then we must move to the next business.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the Minister recall that there was almost precisely the same row at the time of Idi Amin over the export of telephonic equipment? Have the Government learnt nothing from this? Is it not true that licenses were granted when they should not have been, that this was either deliberate or negligent, and that either way the Minister of State for Defence Procurement should resign?

Mr. Sainsbury: I do not recall the export of what the hon. and learned Gentleman called telephonic equipment at the time of Idi Amin. I assure him that we continually review our procedures for controlling defence exports. The procedures are applied most scrupulously and carefully. As he will see from recent events, we have further reviewed

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and improved those procedures, and we are open to further suggestions about anything that can be done to make them even better than they are.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Will the Minister please answer three questions? First, when was his Department informed about Project Babylon, which was in 1988? Secondly, when was his Department informed about Project 839, which has been referred to a number of times through the supergun affair? That concerned an order not for the supergun but for 75 major field guns. I understand that the intelligence service believes that three of those guns have been installed. Thirdly, will there be a change in the procedures for applying for export licences by saying that no licence will be granted unless the end use of all components and manufactured goods is contained in the export licence form that the Minister read to the House?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I have said, it is for the exporter to provide the information that is necessary for the Department to determine whether a licence is required and whether it will be granted. Sometimes it is necessary to ask for additional information, more details of specifications and other matters connected with the application. If the exporter fails to provide accurate information, that part of the form which draws attention to the fact that misleading or wrong information may give rise to proceedings comes into effect. That warning is given on many Government forms.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): As the Minister of State for Defence Procurement insists on denying the *Sunday Times* allegations, which if true would surely be a resignation issue, may we assume that he will take legal action against the *Sunday Times*?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I said in my statement, my hon. Friend strongly denies the interpretation put on the remarks alleged to have been made by him in the *Sunday Times* article.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I am probably the only Member who at one time had a job filling in forms in Iraq. That was during my national service. What has happened to Britain's so-called arms embargo in connection with trade fairs in Iraq which we have supported and which have been held since the embargo? How has Britain been involved in those trade fairs? Have we been attempting to sell dual purpose machine tools?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman speaks about the "so-called" embargo. I assure him that it is an embargo and that, under the terms of the United Nations mandatory sanctions order no civilian or military exports, apart from medicines, are being made to Iraq and Kuwait. He asked about trade fairs since the embargo came into effect. If there have been any such trade fairs, I assure him that there have been no British exhibitors and no support from my Department.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister not realise that no Opposition Member objects to the production of machine tools or to the Machine Tool Technologies Association meeting the Minister? We object to Ministers conniving with exporters to bend the rules to afford trading with Iraq. Until we get a clear indication of where the Minister's minute deviates from that of the trades association, we will continue to push this matter. We will not be satisfied by the use, or abuse, of the sub judice rule. We recognise that legal action may well be brought, but that threat cannot hang indefinitely. As we come nearer to 15 January, right hon. and hon. Members will become more and more anxious about what has or has not been exported to Iraq, and for what purpose.

We give notice that we shall seek clarification in the light of any legal proceedings that have or have not been instituted. If legal proceedings have not been brought, we shall be anxious for the Minister to clarify the matters on which at present he feels incapable of enlightening the House.

Mr. Sainsbury: Perhaps I could clarify the point about the sub judice rule. I did not at any time refer to anything being sub judice. *[Interruption.]* I chose my words carefully, and I shall repeat them. I pointed out that the exports carried out by Matrix Churchill to Iraq and some of the licences granted were now the subject of investigation by Customs and Excise, and it would therefore be improper for me to comment on those matters or say anything that might prejudice any proceedings. That is not the same as the matter being sub judice. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees—presumably this would be in conformity with his views—that, if anything improper had occurred and it was decided that there should be proceedings, we should not say anything that might prejudice those proceedings.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the note of the meeting. As he well knows—I think that he should well know—it is not the custom to disclose such working papers. I note the words that he said in support of the machine tool industry, and I am sure that it was glad to hear them. I was certainly glad to hear them. We continue to hope that it will be successful in exporting machine tools for civilian use to all parts of the world where such exports are permitted.

Points of Order

4.32 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the statement by the Foreign Secretary on Wednesday 28 November, in column 871 of *Hansard*, I suggested that the right hon. Gentleman might not have done his national service. The right hon. Gentleman has written me a courteous letter to point out that he had done his national service with the Royal Artillery from July 1948 to September 1949. I hope that he will accept my apologies for any suggestion to the contrary.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to clarify the old point about the sub judice rule before the House gets itself into some difficulty. Is it the case, Mr. Speaker, that it is for you to rule when a matter is sub judice, and that in the past you have always ruled that matters become sub judice only when a date has been set for the proceedings to begin? Is it right that it is not for Ministers or any other right hon. or hon. Member to decide that a matter is sub judice? Surely it is a matter that is entirely for the Chair.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nellist: It is on the point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need a further point of order, because I can deal with the matter that the hon. Minister for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) has raised.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I said that the matter under discussion was not sub judice. I think that the Minister made that clear in his final comment.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wondered whether you would take the opportunity, perhaps through one of the channels that are available to you, to remind Ministers for the future that, if investigations are taking place, as the Minister for Trade said in his statement, that is entirely different from the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) about court dates or court actions. In this instance, no charges have been laid against anyone. It was wrong for the Minister carefully to choose his words and effectively to produce a smoke screen to stop hon. Members asking questions which otherwise he would be obliged to answer.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The statement on arms sales raised serious and important questions. Have you had any request either for a debate or a statement on the principle of selling lethal weapons to repressive regimes, which leads to the death of many innocent people?

Mr. Speaker: I have not had such a request, but that is exactly the sort of subject that hon. Members might well choose to debate on a private Member's motion day, or even in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you condemn the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) for alleging today on radio in the west midlands that I had irresponsibly tabled questions last year linking Matrix Churchill to Iraqi intelligence? I understand that some concern about that is being expressed in the west midlands.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear that radio broadcast, and I do not know anything about the matter.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Did you not listen to west midlands radio news?

Mr. Speaker: That was not possible.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (No. 2) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

OVERSEA SUPERANNUATION BILL

Ordered,

That the Oversea Superannuation Bill be referred to a Second Reading Committee.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Orders of the Day

Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have not selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

I remind the House that the Bill is very narrow. The wider implications of the community charge can be debated during the debate on an Opposition motion on Wednesday.

4.35 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am amazed, as I am sure you are, that the Secretary of State is not introducing the Bill, which is the earliest opportunity for him to explain what he plans to do about the poll tax.

Mr. Speaker: The choice of Minister to introduce a Bill is not a matter for me. On this occasion, it is the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), and that is quite in order.

Mr. Portillo: It may be helpful if I reiterate that, on Wednesday of this week, the House will have the opportunity to discuss the community charge on an Opposition motion. I look forward to that.

Today, I bring before the House a short technical Bill. It is not about the community charge in general. It is not even about the capping of local authority spending in general. It is about ensuring that, when a local authority has been capped, the reduction in spending that is required is passed on in full to the community charge payer.

I should have thought that such a proposal would command general support in the House. Even those who are opposed to the community charge, even those who are opposed to capping, should not, I would think, want to oppose passing on reductions in spending to the people. Once the reductions in spending have been required and made, it is mere cussedness to wish that the local people nonetheless should be denied the full benefit in the form of lower charges.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Last year I asked the then Secretary of State whether capping expenditure equated with capping the poll tax charge, and I was given the wrong answer. The effect of the Bill will be that, if the rate of collection of the poll tax is less than the Minister anticipates, there will be a further cut in services based on low collection levels. Will the Minister have his mind on the budget, or will he have it on the level of the poll tax charge? They are two separate matters.

Mr. Portillo: As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can bring the cap to bear only on the budget. Non-collection and the estimate of the rates are matters that a local authority must bear in mind when it sets its budget. A local authority cannot, in the middle of a year, alter its estimate of what the collection should be and ask for more money. The Bill will put right a loophole in the process, in a way that I shall explain later.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I have asked the Minister's Department very many questions during the past three years, in an attempt to ascertain what estimates the Department was using for the non-collection or the non-payment of the poll tax. During all that time, I was told that it was impossible to make such estimates. However, on 26 November, the Department at last gave me the figures, albeit missing out Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and half a dozen of the London boroughs where non-payment is highest.

The figures show that, as of 30 September, Lambeth had collected only 41·5 per cent. of its poll tax—in other words, almost 60 per cent. had not been collected. Is not the whole essence of the Bill based on the fact that the Department said that non-payment should be at about 5 per cent.—that is the capping criterion—while Lambeth said that it expected it to be about 15 per cent.? That is why it went to court. On the figures that I have at last been given, is not Lambeth much nearer than the Department to the true position?

Mr. Portillo: The Department believes that community charge collection should be 100 per cent., and makes no allowance for non-collection. It is open to individual local authorities to make estimates of non-collection at the beginning of each year. Once a local authority has done that, it will not be able to change its mind halfway through the year, come back to the Department and ask for more money. But if, at the end of a year, the local authority finds that its collection fund is in deficit, it will be open to it the following year to make an estimate not only of the non-recovered amount but the collection rate in the second year, in the light of its experience the first year.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Before any right hon. or hon. Member is seduced by the eloquent words of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on the difficulties that Lambeth faces with non-collection, will my hon. Friend the Minister remind the House whether that council encountered any difficulty collecting rates? How is Lambeth getting on with the job of collecting last year's rates?

Mr. Portillo: As my hon. Friend implies, there has really been no change. Lambeth had extraordinary difficulty collecting rates, and I believe that years of back payments are still due to it. Its relatively poor performance in collecting the community charge is nothing new, but appears to be a continuation of the council's incompetence in the days of rating.

Mr. Nellist: I cannot allow that remark to go by. How does the Minister explain the situation in Tory Bath, whose Member of Parliament is the former Secretary of State for the Environment? Bath's collection rate so far this year is only 77·1 per cent. Is it not the poll tax, and the fact that millions of people have been made poorer by it, that makes collection so difficult, rather than the inherent inability of local councils to manage their own affairs?

Mr. Portillo: As I understand the hon. Gentleman, Bath is doing 30 per cent. better than Lambeth—which, six months into the year, marks a significant improvement in performance. No doubt Bath will ensure by the end of the

year that it issues demand notices and takes to court people who have not paid—and in that way gets the collection level as close to 100 per cent. as it possibly can.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): What was the collection level in other Tory boroughs under the old rating system? The problem is not one that affects just Labour authorities, as the Minister well knows. Perhaps the Minister will give the House comparative figures for collection levels under the old rating system and the poll tax.

Mr. Portillo: Most authorities managed to achieve collection levels of as high as 98, 99 or even nearly 100 per cent. under the old rating system, and that should be their ambition with the community charge. I am sure that many councils will achieve collection rates in the 90 to 100 per cent. range. However, Lambeth's collection record was pretty poor even under the old rates system, and the borough is still chasing those arrears.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Are we not being slightly distracted? Labour Members appear to be suggesting that, if people who can afford to pay do not do so, the burden should be carried by those who do pay.

Mr. Nellist: That is not what we said.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman appears to prefer shouting about the issue to debating it. He says, "That is not so." Perhaps he will try telling that to Labour councillors in Greenwich, who could pay the community charge but do not pay, and who lead anti-poll tax demonstrations.

Are Labour Members seriously arguing that each rating authority, as it was, and each community charge authority, as it is now, ought to be allowed to change its estimate of community charge income between the time that it sets its budget and at some subsequent point in the same year? If that is what Labour financing is about, the longer we can put it off nationally, the better.

Mr. Portillo: I cannot say whether that is what Labour Members believe, but perhaps they will clarify that aspect when they make their speeches.

As to non-collection, it is not clear to me whether Labour is gleeful about non-collection—which is what one might think, given that 28 Labour Members are refusing to pay the community charge—or upset because non-collection reduces the services that local authorities can provide. That is an extraordinary dilemma in Labour policy between members of the party's Front Bench and Back Benches.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my hon. Friend recall the 1986 Comptroller and Auditor General's report, which examined the efficiency of a number of Labour-controlled inner London boroughs——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Mr. Speaker has already pointed out that the Bill addresses itself to a very narrow issue, and right hon. and hon. Members must not allow the proceedings to develop into a general debate about the community charge.

Mr. Hind: I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall keep to the point. The efficiency displayed by Labour London boroughs in both rates collection and management was questioned in 1986, so that problem has existed in those councils for many years. Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour authorities throughout the country have long faced that difficulty?

Mr. Portillo: I will certainly re-read that report. Where the leader or councillors of a Labour-controlled authority refuse to pay, it is hardly surprising that the collection rate is lower than elsewhere.

It is unclear whether or not Labour will oppose the Bill. It would surprise me if it did, because Labour says that the charge is too high and claims to speak for the people who find it difficult to pay—yet Labour also defends to the last ditch a council's right to deny the community charge payer a reduction in his bill.

I described the narrow scope of the Bill, yet I realise that the House may want to broaden the debate to the extent that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow that to happen. The house may want to know of the community charge review. On that I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said. Whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State feels able to say more on Wednesday, we shall have to want to see.

The House may also want to discuss the theory and practice of capping. I hope that the whole House can agree on the need to contain public spending, of which local authority spending constitutes one quarter. On that, the Labour party is confused. Officially, it recognises, in general terms, the need for restraint, in general—but of course, never in particular. It has no word of complaint about the enormous increases in local authority spending —up by one quarter in just two years. Indeed, authorities are saying that, next year, they need to spend almost 50 per cent. more than they did only three years ago, yet the incomes of those who have to pay for local services have not risen by anything like that amount.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): What has gone wrong to bring about the state of affairs that the Minister describes? The community charge system was meant to ensure that everyone would know what they were paying, and that they would not elect authorities that were likely to charge too much. Is there something wrong with the community charge system, or is there something wrong with the electoral system?

Mr. Portillo: I shall refer later to how accountability has shown itself so far, and how it will show itself in the future.

The Government have proposed paying an extra £3 billion to local government next year. The Labour party says that is not enough. That is its knee-jerk reaction. If we had proposed £13 billion or £30 billion, it would also have said that it was not enough. The fact is Labour will never commit itself to saying how much more the Government should pay. Still less does it say where the money would come from, or whether it would come from borrowing or some other form of taxation.

Labour has consistently opposed the Government's policy of increasing the accountability of local government to the electors. The Government believe that local authority spending—as a part of public expenditure—must be contained. Anyone who doubts that is living in fantasy. The more responsible parts of the Labour party know that perfectly well. Our approach to that need to limit spending operates through controls, improving accountability, and capping.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware of the appalling burden on the ratepayers of Lancashire because of its profligate council. Does he recall that a delegation came to see him about that and other matters? Also, is he aware that, when considering the Bill and other matters, the all-ages social index operates unfairly towards cities such as my own? Will he also bear it in mind—especially for Wednesday—that, if we were to alter the all-ages social index, and to propose that cities such as Lancaster should be able to opt out of the system and become county boroughs, we should all escape the scourge of councils like Lancashire county council?

Mr. Portillo: I received the delegation headed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) with pleasure the other day, and I am considering the points that she put to me, which will form part of the outcome of the settlement that the Government will announce in due course. The broader question takes us a little beyond the scope of the Bill, but both I and, I am sure, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, have heard what my hon. Friend has to say.

In an ideal world, capping would not be necessary. The community charge has undoubtedly greatly increased the pressure of accountability, as we saw last May in Brent, Harrow, Hillingdon, Ealing, Wandsworth, Westminster, Trafford, Derby and Southend. In all those places, Conservative councillors, who promised lower community charges and more efficient government, were returned.

However, in many places, accountability is still obscured. Transitional payments both to the individual and to local authorities will, for some years yet, distort the picture by reducing the charges that people have to pay. Many councils have yet to come up for election since the community charge was introduced, so that people have had no chance as yet to vote for or against particular levels of spending. The counties, for example, face no elections until 1993. In those places where there are two tiers of local government, people have not yet had time to become accustomed to the split between the spending accounted for by the county and that attributable to the district.

For all those reasons, accountability is for the time being blurred. The Government are therefore prepared to cap, both because of the need to control public spending, and as a means of providing a degree of protection for the hapless community charge payer against unscrupulous, wasteful and irresponsible local councils.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman is talking about accountability, but does he not agree that it has been taken away? Local authorities, which are elected each year, are accountable each year for their policies but if accountability is moved to the centre, how can the local authority be accountable? Also, is it not a fact that, because of poll tax capping, the problems that people come to complain about in my surgery are not a result of the fact that the local authority is accountable but a result of the services that the authority is unable to provide because of its low standard spending assessment?

Mr. Portillo: As I was explaining, the question of accountability is distorted by heavy payments made to individuals and to local authorities. Constituents in Barnsley, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, received considerable payments this year, by way of the safety net and the low rateable value grant, which reduced the community charge in his area. Nonetheless, I am sure that his constituents are more than pleased to find that their community charge has fallen from £330, as proposed by the local authority, to £271, which is the substitute amount set after the cap.

Labour's environment team does not seem to believe that councils should be inhibited in any way in what level of tax they themselves raise. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) once departed ever so slightly from this line, when he said that capping should be allowed "in extremis". But he has subsequently proved that that was a moment of absent-mindedness, and he is now firmly back in the "let it rip" camp. Labour's team oppose capping, and they are proud of it. They refuse to acknowledge the misery and financial hardship that the spend, spend, spend, tax, tax, tax policy implies for community charge payers. They show that they fail to grasp that local authority spending is part of public spending. I despair of being able to educate them myself, but I have hopes that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) may yet make some headway.

In the Local Government Finance Act 1988, Parliament has given the Secretary of State powers to cap authorities whose budgets are in his opinion excessive, or which represent an excessive increase over the previous year. We used those powers this year to cap 21 councils. The legality of our use of those powers is not in doubt. Twenty authorities mounted challenges to what we had done; 16 of them pressed their challenges to the House of Lords, but at each stage the challenge to the legality of our actions were dismissed—in all by a total of 11 judges.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my hon. Friend accept that the people of Cleveland are complaining bitterly about the lack of capping upon that spendthrift authority by the Government? It has just decided to spend a seven-figure sum on repainting all its fire engines orange, instead of red, to acquire a corporate image. If it had been rate-capped or community charge-capped, it would not have had the opportunity to waste that money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker pointed out that the scope of the Bill is very narrow.

Mr. Portillo: Nonetheless, I am deeply sympathetic to my hon. Friend, whose constituents face community charge bills of £421 and £429—very high community charges indeed—which are due to that level of overspending.

Haringey failed to reduce its community charge by the full amount of its budget. We challenged that decision in the courts, which held that Haringey's charge was unlawful.

Finally, we took action to force Lambeth to pass on to its charge payers the full reduction in the charge resulting from capping. The court held that, in the particular circumstances of this case, it was lawful for Lambeth to act as it had done, but the Lambeth case, to which this Bill is the response, did not call into doubt our powers to cap budgets, or the way in which we put the caps into effect. As I shall shortly explain, it related only to the question of what level of community charge should result from the cap.

If necessary, we will use our capping powers next year, including our power to cap excessive year-on-year increases, a course which was not open to us this year.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): Is the Minister aware that, while he is taking these powers—as he has confirmed he will continue to do—the contribution by the Government to county council finances in the east Sussex area which I represent, has gone down in the last 10 years—it used to be about 40 per cent. and it is now only 16 per cent? Is the Minister saying that there is a moral justification for taking such excessive powers against a council, when the Government are doing so little to help councils?

Mr. Portillo: When we recently announced that the weighting given to tourism in the standard spending assessments next year would be doubled, the local authority which benefited most was Eastbourne. So I must challenge what the hon. Gentleman has just said.

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman has challenged me. Is he aware that the greatest part of the county council's expenditure is on education, that the reduction in central Government grant to county council expenditure has had a great effect upon our schools and that tourism is only a small percentage of our budget? Unless he does something about education, social services and housing, there will be no answer. Is he aware of all those things?

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. Gentleman felt so strongly about that, I am sure that he would have led a delegation to see Ministers during the consultation period—which, I am afraid, is now closed.

By announcing our intended capping criteria for next year in advance, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) did in his statement on local government finance on 31 October, we have given councils the chance to decide for themselves. Any council which strays into being capped next year will have done so with its eyes open. I do not deny that our criteria are tough, but they are realistic and they are necessary. We will be putting a very great deal of extra money into local government next year, and we will not see it frittered away in unnecessary spending.

We shall, of course, consider carefully the individual circumstances of any authority which we propose for capping. There would, of course, be an opportunity for any authority which was designated to make representations about the level of the proposed cap. That is no mere ritual. What is perhaps more of a ritual is the list of horrors which each local authority trots out in its public presentation—the cuts which they claim to be the inevitable consequence of capping. The list always contains the most sensitive front-line services—never reductions in waste, or improvements in efficiency.

Time and again—from the earliest days of rate capping—such lists have been trotted out, but rarely, oh so rarely, do the predicted horrific consequences in reality occur. Indeed this year, in the middle of the capping process, one authority designated for capping—Hillingdon—changed control, from Labour to Conservative. The Labour administration of Hillingdon had claimed that the proposed cap was "totally inadequate to meet the needs of Hillingdon". What actually proved to be totally inadequate was the Labour administration. Three days later, they were thrown out of power. Under the new management, Hillingdon was able not merely to accept the proposed cap but to set a budget significantly below the cap.

My right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State and I stick firmly by the intentions for criteria laid down by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath. Today, just as when he made that announcement, they remain the Government's proposed criteria for capping in 1991-92. Let no council doubt it for a moment.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Will the Minister confirm that, when an authority is capped, both manpower and services may be affected? Will he give a guarantee that any authority that—having been capped—falls foul of the law by not providing what is legally required of it, because it no longer has the necessary resources, will be indemnified against any court action?

Mr. Portillo: I have already referred to the opportunity that exists for all local authorities to make representations if they are opposed to capping. During such meetings, authorities often mention the difficulties that they feel that they may encounter in meeting their statutory obligations, and I shall bear the matter carefully in mind.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) that his authority, Doncaster, is being allowed a 9 per cent. increase before it comes within the range of capping. That strikes me as very reasonable.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend will be aware that councils such as Lancashire are avoiding making efficiency savings. A report that Lancashire commissioned from P and A recently showed that its social services and homes for the elderly were in a disastrous state. It has, however, shelved that report and done nothing about it. It is already £4 million overspent on its social services budget, and is now making cuts.

There is clearly a message here for councils: they should take the advice of those whom they hire to investigate their position. That is exactly the point that my hon. Friend was making a moment ago.

Mr. Portillo: I certainly agree that councils should be willing to take the best advice on how to run their affairs efficiently. My hon. Friend will probably be pleased to know that next year Lancashire will be restricted to a budget increase of 9 per cent., if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State applies the criteria as he has said he will.

The purpose of this short Bill is to amend the existing law on the setting of substitute personal community charges to guarantee that the budget reductions that a council makes as a result of capping will feed through in full to chargepayers.

We decided to introduce the Bill following the judgments of the divisional court and the Court of Appeal in the Lambeth case in September. Lambeth chose, when setting its substitute charges, to deprive its charge payers of over half the cut in the charge implied by the reductions that it had been required to make in its excessive budget. That looked to me like a spiteful decision by the council. While there is an argument—not one that I accept, but one that I understand—that capping forces councils to make cuts that they think should not be made, I cannot see why, once they have been required to make those reductions, however reluctantly, they should still resist passing on to their charge payers the full reduction in their bill resulting from that cap.

[Mr. Portillo]

What motive can there be for seeking to deny hard-pressed charge payers the full benefits of capping, especially for a political party that feigns concern for those who find it hard to afford the charge? Yet Lambeth was not alone in attempting to do its charge payers out of their dues. Haringey—and, to a lesser extent, a number of other authorities—tried it; indeed, Haringey went so far that we successfully challenged the legality of its decision in the courts—as I have already mentioned.

I believe that it would be wrong in principle for us to leave in place a loophole that enables an authority to deny its charge payers the full benefit of capping. This Bill puts matters beyond doubt for the future. By doing that, I hope that we can save a lot of court time and community charge payers' money which might otherwise be spent testing the law or contesting actions by Government or local councils. The reductions that an authority is obliged to make owing to capping will lead to commensurate cuts in charges, and we propose that that should be made entirely clear.

The Bill seeks to achieve its aim by means of a formula. It appears a complex formula, because it is algebraic. Let me briefly interpret it. The Bill provides that the new charge must be derived by our subtracting from the old charge the difference between the old budget and the new budget, divided by the area's adult population. If a budget is reduced through capping by, say, £50 per community charge payer, the community charge must be cut by £50.

Clauses 1 and 2 of the Bill must cater for that in the case of, first, precepting authorities and then, separately, charging authorities. It also prevents the use of a dodge to get around the formula by setting a further higher charge, after using the formula in clause 3. It must make provision for what authorities must do if, for example, both the district and the county are capped. Clause 4 ensures that there will be no wasteful multiple re-billing in such cases, and clause 5 deals with refunds that may be due to charge payers after capping.

Mr. Fraser: I understand the equation "A−(B−C) divided by the number in the adult population". How would the Minister determine "E", which is, I believe, between 0 and 1?

Mr. Portillo: "E" will apply to the City of London. It is intended to ensure that the reduction due to the community charge payer is passed on, because the finances of the City of London are very particular and specialised. The factor is 0·01. Although the Bill does not say that "E" refers to the City, I am able to reveal that it does.

The Bill is not as complicated as it looks. I admit that it is not proof against mockery from Mr. Matthew Parris, on the ground that its meaning does not at once leap from the page: that is the point that the Liberal Democrats have tried to make in their reasoned amendment, which has not been selected. I shall, however, endeavour to make all its provisions absolutely clear to the Standing Committee, and I shall supply every hon. Member who serves on it with all the helpful explanatory material that I can provide. Even so, I recognise that it is likely to give hon. Members some scope for amusement at my expense in Committee.

One thing that is truly in earnest is the Government's determination to keep council spending under control, and to offer charge payers a degree of protection against profligate councils. The House will know that we found it necessary to make use of capping under the rating system: capping is not, therefore, a by-product of our moving to the community charge. For the reasons that I have explained, it might be necessary under any system of local government finance. Because of that, I see no merit in the other part of the Liberal Democrat amendment, which implies that we should hold fire until we have completed our review.

The Bill is needed in any event, and it is needed in time to protect community charge payers from April 1991. The loophole exists today—a loophole that threatens to cheat charge payers of the reductions in charge to which they should be entitled. The Bill closes it, and it is designed to guarantee that local people benefit from lower council spending.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Does that mean that, from April 1991, nothing will be done in the House to alter the current structure and system of the poll tax and its operation?

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the second paragraph of my speech, in which I said that I had nothing to say about the community charge review further to what had been said by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The hon. Gentleman and others will, however, have an opportunity to raise points in Wednesday's debate. We look forward to that.

If local councils will not act in the local interest, the Government will require them to do so. The Bill is part of that commitment, and I commend it to the House.

5.8 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I am unlikely to be alone in detecting in the Minister's speech some embarrassment at the fact that he had to come to the Dispatch Box today to present this measure. That embarrassment arises, I think, from the existence of a puzzle at the heart of the Bill, which the Minister did not seek to resolve. That puzzle is not to do with the Bill's complexities—although, as the Minister has conceded, anyone who recalls the Government's promise that the poll tax Bill would be simple would be forgiven for seeing in the complicated provisions of this short Bill yet another poll tax promise that turned out to be false.

The real puzzle is why we should still be confronted with such a measure at all. Why do the Government, who have totally lost confidence in the poll tax, still insist on turning the poll tax screw even tighter? Why, after all the damage, failures, broken promises, insuperable difficulties, repudiations and resignations, do the Government still doggedly insist on digging themselves yet deeper into the hole that they have created? Why, after all the misery that the poll tax has meant for millions, the damage to local government services and the threats to the role of local government itself, do we still have to debate a measure that can only make matters worse?

Have the Government truly learnt nothing from the debacle of the last year or so, or is the truth, perhaps, that the lesson is clear enough but that they are paralysed by indecision about what to do about the poll tax? How can the Minister stand at the Dispatch Box and present a measure whose purpose—to nail down the discretion that

remains to local authorities as to how to set the poll tax —is flatly contradicted by statements made in recent weeks by virtually all his senior colleagues in Government?

Is the Minister unaware that the new Prime Minister has admitted that the problems of the poll tax are a technician's nightmare and that they have created an irresistible momentum for further change? The Prime Minister blames those changes on the fact that the Cabinet were "bounced"—his word—into decisions. Why, then, are we being bounced into taking this step, when surely the right course is to have a period of mature reflection so that the full implications of the Conservative party's disenchantment with—indeed, abandonment of—its flagship can be fully digested before it sails further on to the rocks?

Is the Minister aware that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) has variously described the poll tax as "indefensible", " a grave error of judgment", "completely unworkable" and "politically catastrophic"?

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, irrespective of what happens in the House today, it is impossible to introduce a new system of local government taxation by 1 April 1991 together with all the necessary back-up that would be required. Surely it is better to deal with the problems at this stage by means of an interim measure and then to have a full review of the community charge.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to the hon. Gentlman. He at least is a little clearer on that point—although I am not satisfied that he is right—than was his ministerial colleague. My purpose is to try to smoke out the senior Treasury Bench Ministers. We do not have the Secretary of State, a point to which I shall turn later.

Mr. Holt: He is sitting there.

Mr. Gould: Of course he is sitting there, but I want him to get up to answer the question. I want to know what the relevance of this measure is to the fundamental review to which the Secretary of State has committed himself. He will probably not intervene, because he is already on record about the principles embodied in the Bill.

Let me deal with other Cabinet members. A moment ago I dealt with an ex-Cabinet member, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. The new Secretary of State for Education and Science——

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister rightly drew attention to the narrowness of the Bill. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is making a wide-ranging speech, without intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is following the pattern set by the Minister when he addressed the House.

Mr. Gould: As I am sure you will confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when a Bill is given its Second Reading, it is perfectly legitimate for the Opposition to inquire why it has been introduced, given the political context from which it emerges. That is the point that I intend to pursue. From the line of argument that I am developing, we shall see that the point of the Bill emerges clearly and in an unfavourable light.

I was about to quote the new Secretary of State for Education and Science. He concedes that the poll tax is a major problem. The Minister can hardly be unaware, either, that the Secretary of State for the Environment until just a week ago, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) who was in charge of the poll tax, is on record as saying that the poll tax is a bomb that has to be defused. If that is the case, why prime it further so that it makes an even bigger bang? Why should not the Minister adhere to the position, now revealed—admittedly, rather late in the day—by his former superior, that the poll tax cannot proceed in its present form? The Minister cannot be unaware, either, that the present Secretary of State for the Environment has repeatedly denounced the poll tax.

In deference to Mr. Speaker's ruling, I shall not go into the details of the myriad complaints and denunciations that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has levelled against the poll tax. They can await our debate on Wednesday. However, we ought to recall that the right hon. Member for Henley made his critique of the poll tax and his determination to replace it in some form or another the centrepiece of his election strategy for the Tory leadership. He was joined by every other candidate for the Tory leadership. All agreed, at least implicitly, that the poll tax had been a disaster. Why, then, does the Minister come to the House with this measure, which has been disowned, at least by implication, by the Government as a whole and by his own Secretary of State?

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is setting up a bogey man that he intends to shoot down. My hon. Friend the Minister stated clearly that the point that the hon. Gentleman addresses is not relevant to the Bill. The Bill had to be introduced in order to enable the Government effectively to cap councils that overspend. That was true under the rates. It is now true under the community charge. Why does the hon. Gentleman persist in pursuing a point that is not at issue today?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman seems, surprisingly, not to have heard the made repeatedly point by the Minister in the second paragraph of his speech. In it he explicitly refrained from making the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. The reason is that the Minister will not say what relationship the Bill will bear to whatever emerges from the fundamental review. He does not intend to tell us anything about that. Therefore, we are entitled to ask the question; we have not yet had an authoritative answer.

It is not surprising, and it is perhaps significant, that the new Secretary of State for the Environment on this occasion—the first occasion he has had on which to address this major preoccupation, this virtual obsession —remains silent and simply a bystander. I suspect that the Secretary of State just sits there because he is happy to allow the Minister to be the fall guy.

Why is that happening? There is one explanation: that, on this occasion, the Minister is a volunteer, not just a pressed man. He alone in the whole of the Government still believes in the poll tax. He still believes that its dread disciplines must be imposed, irrespective of the damage they cause. That was his message to the Tory conference just a few weeks ago. He told the Tory party then:

"far from being a vote loser, with your help, it"—

the poll tax—

"will be a vote winner and launch us on our fourth term."

[Mr. Gould]

If I recall correctly, that stirring statement earned only the most lukewarm of applause. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would be hard put to it to find anyone who now subscribes to those sentiments.

The Minister was soon at it again. On 14 November, he told us that the poll tax review was now complete—that no further changes were needed and that all the problems had been ironed out. Thus spake the last true believer in the poll tax, before he was overwhelmed by the headlong rush of all his senior colleagues, including the right hon. Member for Henley, to bale out from a disaster area.

On that interpretation, the Minister deserves at least some recognition of the fact that he alone still has the courage of his colleagues' former convictions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman ought to return to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Gould: That is exactly what I intend to do.

There is, however, one further possible interpretation of the Minister's position on the Bill. It begins with our recollection that he was originally appointed as the then Secretary of State's minder—a member of the Stasi, one might say—to ensure that there was no backsliding and that the sacred principles would be intact after the last review had taken place. Is that, perhaps, still his role? Is his continuation as Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities a sign that he is required by the Prime Minister to ensure that the fundamental review becomes just a matter of further refinements? Is that why he is still with us, doggedly chanting the same old incantations, pursuing the same old rituals and demanding the same old sacrifices?

The Minister is out of line with the Secretary of State not only on the principle of the poll tax but on the point advanced by the Bill—capping and the apparent closing of the Lambeth loophole. On that point perhaps above all others, the Secretary of State was most clear and specific in his critique of the poll tax. He aimed a scatter-gun at virtually everything about the poll tax, but the one thing on which he was very clear was the point about capping.

The Bill, after all, is the measure of a Government who are not content with their power to fix budgets for local authorities. The purpose of the Bill is to make the poll tax cap fit even tighter, to override the judgments, as the Minister pointed out, of the High Court and Court of Appeal by permitting the Secretary of State to fix the poll tax bill—at least by necessary implication—without reference to factors such as the collection level in a locality or its effect on services and on the ridiculous assumption, which was confirmed by the Minister, that the collection level will be 100 per cent.

It is the most extreme form of central Government diktat over local government that we have yet seen, and all in the name of a poll tax which is now completely discredited. How can the Minister argue for a measure that empowers the Secretary of State to substitute for the judgment of the local authority on the size of the poll tax bill, when the judgment of the Government on the principle of the tax has been repudiated by their own supporters?

Mr. Holt: Would an incoming Labour Government place any controls on local government, or would it be allowed to set whatever level of charges it wished on the local inhabitants of its area?

Mr. Gould: We have repeatedly made it clear that we do not think that capping is the right answer to the problem. As I shall show, the Secretary of State agrees with us.

In his celebrated article in *The Times* on 10 May, the Secretary of State said that they had "crawled over" the capping option but finally rejected it. Why had they crawled over it but rejected it? He pointed out the practical difficulties of setting a limit that is neither too high nor too low, and he concluded that such a system would

"negate accountability and be an act of centralised political power outside our experience. On these grounds alone, it should be resisted."

The hon. Gentleman made those points with all the more force because he knows, as we know and as everybody knows, that the only case made for the poll tax was that it would improve accountability. With that same perverse destructive logic that has destroyed everything it touches, the poll tax has now attacked the principle that gave it birth. The Bill is the death knell of accountability. It means that every aspect of local government finance is under central Government control.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Does not the nation understand that that is the prime reason why the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is not still our Prime Minister?

Mr. Gould: I am sure that is right, and I am sure that it is very much the view of the Secretary of State.

As a consequence of this measure, every poll tax bill will, either directly or by necessary implication, be sent out with the sanction of the Government. The bills that arrive next spring will be the Government's bills.

The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has scored not the full success that he clearly hoped for but at least a change in the leadership of the Tory party and recognition that the poll tax has to change. But at the very time when he secured that change and put the party in a position where it is doing all it can to distance itself from the measure that it created, the Bill locks the Government in even more tightly to every poll tax bill. That is a negation of accountability carried to an extreme which even the Secretary of State could not have foreseen.

The Secretary of State presumably agrees with us. He advised us in his article in May to resist. "Resist"? Introducing a Bill in his name that will put the Government in charge of the poll tax not only does not resist the measure but nails down the coffin lid even more firmly. "Resist"? We should not have to resist. In the political situation that now obtains, the Bill should be withdrawn. The idea, the policy and the poll tax that the Bill defends is bankrupt and defunct. If resist we must, resist we shall. We shall resist with our votes against the Bill. We challenge the Secretary of State to join us in that resistance in the Lobby this evening.

5.25 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who is now leaving, to the Front Bench. I never realised that I had quite such an effect on Ministers, but one learns something every day.

Perhaps the fact that my right hon. Friend was on the Front Bench shows that a rethink on the community charge is needed. Many of us welcome that rethink and look forward to his deliberations. In the meantime, it would be impossible to introduce, for the next financial

year, a fundamental change in the system of local government finance. The Bill amends the current system and enables some sensible financing under the present legislation.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) referred to damage to local government. The Bill does no damage to local government. It represents a need for prudent financing, cost savings and provision of good value for money for the payers of local government tax, whether it be rates, the community charge or, as the Liberal Democrats would advocate, a local income tax. It does not matter what the system is, because what is needed is a prudently financed system that serves the community and provides good services. The purpose behind the Bill is to protect local government taxpayers from profligate financing by local government and to prevent it from taking from community charge payers far more money than they can afford, which reduces their standard of living.

Mr. Allen McKay: The hon. Gentleman is talking about prudent financing. Why does he support a system that costs my authority £3·5 million more than collecting rates? He is supporting a Bill that will increase that expenditure.

Mr. Hind: I cannot speak for the hon. Gentleman's authority, but some authorities in Lancashire—mine in particular—have had no trouble in collecting the community charge. A large number of people registered and the cost has not been excessive. The cost of collection probably comes down to prudent financial management. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's local authority is prudent. I assume that it is Wakefield——

Mr. McKay *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hind: It is Barnsley, then. A number of authorities in Yorkshire missed being capped by a whisker as a result of the £26 rule. That suggests to me that their spending was high and that their community charge was high, which in turn suggests a sad lack of prudent financial management.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My hon. Friend has argued that the Bill seeks to limit councils' spending, and hon. Members and people outside the House are presuming that the Bill will automatically produce a proportionate reduction in the community charge. Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that, although it limits council spending, the Bill will not specifically prevent a council from imposing a penalty on charge payers in respect of those who will not—I stress "will not"—pay their community charge? There will be a levy on the innocent to make up for the crimes of the guilty. Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that the Bill needs to be strengthened—quite the opposite of what the Labour party has argued?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a good point. There can be no excuse for disobeying the law by not paying the community charge, especially as failure to pay by some people may result in a burden being placed on those who do pay. That is grossly unjust. Do those who refuse to pay —unfortunately, there are some hon. Members among them—consider paying what they would have paid under the rating system? Do they not realise that, by their refusal to pay, they are depriving children in schools and elderly people in homes, and taking money from the meals-on-wheels and home help services? They are hitting the most vulnerable people in society who cannot afford to hit back.

Suppose that a Labour Government—I doubt whether we shall see one in my lifetime—introduced a tax with which we disagreed. They would not smile if we said that we would not pay it. Refusal to pay is a recipe for anarchy——

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman is a classic example. He has refused to pay, and I shall certainly not give way to him.

Rate capping was used to control local government spending and so protect the ratepayer, and community charge capping has been similarly successful in protecting the charge payer. A Gallup poll conducted in April 1990 showed that 53 per cent. of voters recognised the need for the Government to protect the community charge payer in certain circumstances from excessive spending by local authorities. I would point out that 43 per cent. of Labour voters think that, too. Presumably many of them live in areas with Labour-controlled local authorities and bear the burden of those councils' profligacy.

The hon. Member for Dagenham argued that there was no excuse for capping, and that we should abandon it now. I maintain that there are plenty of reasons for capping. In my own county of Lancashire, for example, we must encourage councillors and local government managers to focus their attention on the need for proper prudent financial management.

Lancashire spent a vast amount on a P and A report, in which the social services provided by the council were examined. That report has been shelved. It said that the meals-on-wheels and home help services, as well as some of the criteria used in the running of old people's homes, were a disaster, and suggested ways in which the system could be improved and in which money could be saved for the benefit of community charge payers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Bill deals with particular aspects of community charge capping. So far, I have allowed the debate to range over the general principle of charge capping. The hon. Gentleman is taking the matter a stage further and referring generally to the relative wisdom of the community charge and other systems of local government finance. He is going very wide of the subject before us.

Mr. Hind: I shall bring my remarks back into order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Dagenham described the Bill as the death knell of accountability. My point is that, far from being the death knell of accountability, it will focus the attention of local councillors and local government officials on the need to give good value for money in the provision of services to the public and on the cost of those services. That is what the Bill is all about. Lancashire increased its expenditure by 15 per cent. last year when inflation was only 7·8 per cent. Can an increase of twice the rate of inflation reflect prudent financial management?

Many hon. Members, myself included, originally failed to identify a further reason why capping will be important. In local government, we have a four-year cycle. In the first year following its election, a council may increase the charge that it levies by a huge amount. For the first three

[Mr. Hind]

years, the extra money will be stored away in the bank reserves. In the year of an election, all the reserves that have been accumulated can be used to reduce the charge to ensure that the council is re-elected. We can surely expect prudent financial management every year, and capping will focus the attention of local government officials and councillors on the need to avoid that cycle of events which is to the detriment of local charge payers—although, to be fair, I ought to say that all councils of all political complexions are guilty of the practice.

Mr. Allen McKay: I must challenge the hon. Gentleman's statement. He said that all councils were guilty of the practice. My council has always gone to the electors after three years. It is evident that the hon. Gentleman does not know much about local government. Authorities cannot create reserves to spend in later years, because the books are audited and the auditors would pick the sums up. Authorities can only accumulate reserves for a rainy day. The Government's policies have made them spend that money, so that now nothing is left for a rainy day.

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman has picked me up on my general point. Let me be more specific. The hon. Gentleman was talking about district councils, and I agree that they are elected on a three-year cycle. I was talking about county councils, which are elected every four years.

In my district of west Lancashire, £32 of the community charge is payable to the district council and the remainder —£344—is payable to the county council. That is why capping is important. A survey was carried out in west Lancashire of 500 voters, who were asked what the district council and the county council do. The majority of the voters did not know, and they did not know where the money went.

Under the two-tier system, the district and the county councils should send out separate bills to the charge payers. They should be able to justify that expenditure, so that the odium does not fall on district councillors who, particularly in west Lancashire, run a good council prudently and who budget sensibly.

We are debating the Bill against the backdrop of a review. However, whatever comes out of the review, we must ask for good prudent management of local government resources from our local representatives and officials. It is essential that we introduce this proposal next year to protect community charge payers, because there is a danger, particularly in Lancashire, that the community charge will be whacked up as high as possible to embarrass Conservative Members who represent Lancashire.

That would be an attempt to turn the voters against those Conservative Members. The rise would have nothing to do with prudent financing, but a lot to do with the exploitation of a political advantage. That rise should not be allowed to happen at the expense of the voters and those who genuinely cannot afford the rise. Against the backdrop of the review, which I greatly welcome, I do not hesitate to support the Bill.

5.41 pm

Mr. A. J. N. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I cannot imagine that there is another legislature in any democracy in the western world that is currently attempting to digest a piece of legislation remotely comparable to the Bill. Can anyone imagine that Chancellor Kohl, fresh from his election victory, and his Free Democrat allies are rushing down to the Bundestag to legislate that

$$\frac{A-((B-C)\times E)}{D}$$

should be the formula for the local citizens of Bonn to contribute to their local affairs? That is utterly inconceivable. No sensible legislature at national level would attempt to legislate in such absurd and complex detail for the affairs of local government, which most other countries believe can be better settled and resolved at local government level.

If the events of the past two weeks had not taken their rather dramatic turn, the Bill would have been introduced on the basis that it was a small technical refinement to an otherwise excellent piece of legislation on the community charge, which was described by the outgoing Prime Minister as the best local tax that has yet been invented. It remains to be seen whether that was intended as a challenge to the inventive powers of her then opponent, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who is now the Secretary of State for the Environment. Obviously the Secretary of State for the Environment has left the Chamber and gone away to invent something as rapidly as he can.

The Minister introduced the Bill with a slight air of apology, and said that the review must go ahead. He said that the Bill should be on the statute book notwithstanding that review. Why must we have the Bill at all? Why must we have substitute setting with or without the formula of A plus B times C and all the rest of it? Surely the poll tax was intended above all to produce such high accountability for local spending that no one would elect an authority that would land him with an unreasonable charge.

Many people now have to pay unreasonable levels of poll tax. However, the outcome of legislation so far, which will not be solved by the Bill, is that no one can agree who is to blame for the unreasonable levels of poll tax. The Government claim that it is all the fault of the wicked socialists and sometimes they are right. However, that does not entirely explain the situation in many Conservative-controlled areas. It does not even explain the situation in local authorities where Conservative oppositions have argued that the spending assessments are inadequate and that something near the authorities' proposals should be spent.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that local authorities should have an unfettered ability to spend their own money without control from central Government? That is the heart of this legislation.

Mr. Beith: I shall come to that later and consider what we should put in place to prevent all this nonsense. The principle by which local government should operate, and does operate in many countries, is that local authorities are accountable to the local electorate for what they spend. Central Governments do not need to interfere. Certain conditions must be met for that, and I shall consider those in a moment.

Even before the Bill—and probably more so after it is enacted—people were completely confused as to who is to blame for high poll tax charges. Much of the blame is laid at the door of the Government's standard spending assessments, not least by some of the Government's

supporters who, in Northumberland, argue that Northumberland's standard spending assessment is not satisfactory.

When the poll tax was introduced, it was said that it would be an easier tax to collect than the rates. No one involved in the rating system believed that for a moment. It was clear that the poll tax would be more difficult to collect. The central issue in the Bill is whether a local authority will be allowed during the year to revise upwards its estimate of the cost to it of non-payment.

In my part of the world, there is quite a lot of non-payment, which is not based on political campaigns. Some people campaign for non-payment, but many are struggling desperately to keep up their payments from an income that does not meet their costs. They do not want to take part in a campaign or to be in the firing line. They just wonder where they will find the next payment. As a result, local authorities find it difficult to meet their bills and in particular to come to terms with the levels of revenue that the Government said that it was reasonable for them to expect.

The anomalies produced by the poll tax could not have been dealt with in a Bill as small as this. Even if we consider the anomaly on which the Bill is based, why did the Government start by capping expenditure if they are now dissatisfied with that arrangement? The Government introduced the Bill because they now believe that they should have capped the poll tax levels in the first place and not the levels of expenditure. If the Government could not get that right, it is not surprising that they got so much else wrong in the poll tax.

However, no one has explained why they did it that way in the first place. Was it an extraordinary discovery that at the end of the day there might be a difference between the effects of capping expenditure and the effects of capping the tax level? The Government did not seem to realise that such a difference might arise. We should not have needed this Bill if the Government had got that right in the first place.

If we enact this change in the poll tax, it will not deal with the grinding unfairness of the poll tax or with the crude inequity of the system, in which some areas cannot fix reasonable levels of poll tax because of the way in which the grant system works. For example, in my constituency, the poll tax is more than £435 in Castle Morpeth. That is £100 a head higher than in the neighbouring areas of the same county. That difference is not related to the level of expenditure in Castle Morpeth; it stems from the system of reliefs and transitional provisions in which the council finds itself enmeshed and the crude way in which the Government have lumped together areas of high and low rateable values and treated them as if they were the same.

The same lack of attention to detail gives rise to the Bill. The Government have failed to consider the precise consequences of legislating in a particular way. The Bill will not help those in sheltered housing schemes who do not qualify for transitional relief. It will not help people who are struggling to pay their own way, who do not receive benefits and are not dependent on housing benefits or community charge benefits, because they have just enough capital to exclude them from such benefits. They do not receive any benefit from transitional relief.

A little later this evening, hon. Members will discuss another Bill that deals with another anomaly that is illustrative of the Government's failure to get it right. I refer to the Bill dealing with caravans and caravan sites. As the Government have got so many things wrong, including the central issues of this Bill, that it is difficult to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that the current review will bring an end to all the problems.

We do not know how the Bill will fit in with the results of the review that the Secretary of State has rushed away to work on. We do not know whether we shall get banding or, a scrapping of the tax, or how far the Secretary of State is prepared to go towards local income tax. During his election campaign he was asked why he was not prepared to support the Liberal Democrat proposal of a local income tax. His reply was——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is in order for the hon. Gentleman to try to identify all the various aspects of the community charge that are not included in the Bill and then seek to debate them. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will confine his remarks to what is contained in the Bill.

Mr. Beith: I am seeking to establish how, according to the formula in the Bill, substitute setting would work, if, as appears to be the Minister's intention, the Bill remained on the statute book, but fundamental changes were nevertheless made in the tax to which it applies. For example, local income tax, which would clearly be one of the directions in which we could go——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That matter is not relevant to the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will confine his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that it was a long-standing tradition of the House that it was always reasonable on Second Reading for the debate to be fairly wide and for hon. Members to speculate about the implications of a certain measure on other measures. I thought that it was only on Third Reading that we must refer narrowly to the Bill. It seems that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is legitimately raising issues that many hon. Members have already raised and that many others would wish to raise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have allowed a wide debate. I thought that I had been the object of some reproach for allowing too wide a debate. *[Interruption.]* It must be for the Chair to judge how widely a debate can range. I do not see anything in the Bill that gives rise to a debate about alternative methods of raising local government finance, such as local income tax. Perhaps we may proceed.

Mr. Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not wish in any way to challenge your ruling, but it occurred to me that it is impossible to oppose the Bill or, indeed, to speak in favour of it without speaking within the circumstances of it. There are apparently now no Tory Members, or perhaps there is one, who have supported the poll tax anyway. They are about to bring forward legislation to remove the basis of the Bill, which is the 1988 legislation. Perhaps you could enable the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to explain what the alternative would be for controlling expenditure in the Lambeth case in the event that the 1988 Act were repealed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Beith.

Mr. Beith: I hope that you will understand my difficulty, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I accept—it was in the

[Mr. Beith]

process of accepting it that I was making my point about what the Secretary of State had said—that the Secretary of State will not introduce a local income tax. He gave a reason for that, and it is relevant to the background—that he was not a Liberal Democrat. I do not think that that is a sufficient reason.

However, let us take it for granted that, on that narrow doctrinaire ground, he has decided not to introduce a local income tax. What I think he may do and what will enable him to keep the Bill on the statute book while he does so is to get as near as he can to a local income tax within the framework of the community charge and preserve the poll tax-capping powers that are in the legislation, refined as they would be by the Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Bill.

The Secretary of State wants to get as near as he can to a local income tax without having to admit that we were right and so many of his colleagues are wrong. If he proceeds along that road, unless he is prepared to go virtually the whole way, he will end up with even more anomalies than the Bill addresses. Any attempt to use banding is likely to cause extremely complicated arrangements and substantial poverty traps. Instead of having the substitute setting Bill, we shall have a series of fresh Bills to deal with all those matters, and the Secretary of State will be in a similar difficulty. Night after night, hon. Members will be faced with another Bill to modify yet another aspect of this ludicrous tax—it is so ludicrous as to be virtually unreformable without total abolition and replacement.

An important core principle has been raised by Ministers and by Opposition Members. Is it possible to have a system of local taxation, even one based on the community charge, in which we do not have the capping mechanism and we do not need legislation to set out in detail what authorities individually are allowed to charge? I maintain that it is, but we must get the conditions right. The Secretary of State has shown some awareness that there are such conditions in the wide-ranging ideas which he has put forward and which certainly go far wider than he is proposing tonight. He obviously recognises that accountability must be genuine and that people must see what they will be charged and who is responsible for the level of charge.

It is possible to leave freedom to local authorities if we have a fair tax—I propose a local income tax—and a fair voting system, so that the outcome of the votes that are cast is representational of the council chamber, and if we recognise that, in that context, we can have some reasonable diversity around the country about the choices that people make.

At the heart of the Bill is a belief on the part of the Government that diversity is not allowed and that it is not reasonable for one part of the country to choose a higher level of expenditure than people in another part. If that is their belief, they are flying in the face of centuries of tradition of local diversity—centuries of tradition to which Bills such as this are completely foreign. If one were to show such legislation to many past prominent local government leaders, even people who have been Conservatives, they would find it extraordinary that any Government of any party, least of all their own, should want to propose such legislation.

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that past local government Conservative leaders would be astonished by the legislation. Those people recognised the need for prudent financing. They did not collect high rates. They did not need this sort of legislation. This matter is one of the problems that has come out of the 1970s and 1980s. Surely the hon. Gentleman must agree that, if there are high levels of local income tax, if he were in power he would want to protect payers on a local basis and would need such legislation.

Mr. Beith: I believe in democracy. If the system is right and it is clear who is responsible, which it certainly is not at the moment and will not be under the Bill, I do not see why a case as strong as that should not be put by those very Conservatives to their own local electorates so that they win elections for those councils if the public support their case. That is the principle for which I am arguing.

I hope that, in all his considerations, the Secretary of State will get a little nearer to that principle, but it is far from clear what will happen. There has been a major change of heart in the Government in respect of the poll tax. The tradition is that if one is greeted by a blinding light on the road to Damascus, one of one's first actions is to cease to make further arrangements for the persecution of Christians. The essential steps following conversion do not seem to have been taken by the Government, and there is no better illustration than this ridiculous Bill.

5.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few comments.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) asked why it was necessary to debate the measure in the light of the events of recent days and the announcements by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment. He missed the point, which was well made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, that capping is not simply germane to the community charge but that it was also necessary and used under the iniquitous rating system that the Opposition seem so enthusiastic about reintroducing in a slightly modified way. It needs to be used now, and it may need to be used in future. The hon. Member for Dagenham was being uncharacteristically obtuse in not realising that the measure is extremely important as an effective mechanism for controlling high local government expenditure.

Mr. Corbyn: Could the hon. Gentleman explain to the House how, if 373 Conservative Members no longer believe in the poll tax, it ever got through the House? Was it just a trick of the light?

Mr. Mitchell: First, the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that if I were to stray too far down that path you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not permit me to proceed, and I should not dream of trying your patience in that way. Secondly, the Government have always made it absolutely clear that they have every intention of keeping the community charge under continual review until it has settled down. Therefore, it is not surprising that there have been three, possibly four, reviews since its introduction.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my hon. Friend agree that, when our colleagues voted for the principle of the poll tax it never occurred to them that local authorities such as our own in Nottinghamshire would have the nerve or the gall

to impose on the citizens of Nottinghamshire what has been described as £104 million-worth of improved services, which amounts to £100 extra from every adult in our county?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. I have no doubt that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will draw to the attention of the House the effect that the capping legislation might have on Nottinghamshire next year at a time of such heavy increases in expenditure and when everyone in my hon. Friend's constituency and in mine has recognised the almost undisguised glee with which Nottinghamshire's Labour-controlled county council has bumped up its expenditure under the disguise of implementing the community charge.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The hon. Gentleman said that he could not see what connection the Bill had with the poll tax. Perhaps he could explain why the Bill simply changes sections 35 and 107 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which deals only with the poll tax. If the Minister was concerned about capping in general, why has he not changed some other pieces of local government legislation, of which there are many? How on earth can the hon. Gentleman defend changing that legislation which I hope that he would vote to repeal? We certainly intend to vote for the repeal of that Act as soon as the Secretary of State has the nerve to put such a motion before the House.

Mr. Mitchell: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's intervention need not come from me. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities spelled it out clearly when he dealt with the need for this Bill at this time. As he made clear—perhaps it bears repeating one more time—the Government attach considerable importance to effective capping, which was necessary under the rating system and which is even more necessary under the present system.

I should like to put on the record my intense gratitude to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities who, during the last review, took many soundings from Conservative Back Benchers. I am grateful for the time that he afforded to me, and I am delighted to hear that there is to be another review. I very much hope that many of the points that were made during the last review will now, in view of subsequent events, be worthy of greater consideration than they were given at that time. I am sure that there is now determination and great scope for changing the community charge in a helpful manner.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is now no excuse for any authority to be capped because my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the former Secretary of State for the Environment, set out the criteria for capping some weeks ago? When preparing its budget for the start of the next financial year, every local authority knows exactly what its limits are. Therefore, any authority that is capped has volunteered for it and is deliberately taking on the Government head on.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that point bears underlining. Many local government bodies and amalgamations of them made it clear that, if there was to be any capping criteria for next year, they wanted it spelled out clearly by the Secretary of State for the Environment well in advance of determining their budgets. As my hon. Friend has said so clearly, those criteria have been spelt out in the House and to all local authorities. So any local authority that decides to breach those guidelines will be volunteering itself to be capped. I believe that that extremely important message has now gone out.

In his speech my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) referred to the critical importance of paying the community charge and of ensuring that authorities are not capped. He spoke about the effect that non-payment can have on meals-on-wheels and other critical services. It is extremely important that anyone who decides not to pay the community charge—we heard something about this from the hon. Member for Dagenham—should realise the effect that that can have on the services which, no doubt, that person seeks to defend.

One would have preferred to hear the hon. Gentleman make a clear statement calling on everyone to pay his or her community charge. Perhaps he should have made a few comments about the 28 Opposition Members who have declined to pay their community charge. It would have been more helpful to the House and to the local authorities that are struggling to collect the community charge if the hon. Gentleman had done so.

When considering capping, one should not neglect the fact that it is extremely popular in the country. A recent survey showed that only 36 per cent. of those who were asked were not in favour of the capping procedure and would not wish the Government to use it where necessary. That is a powerful boost from public opinion in support of capping.

One should also bear in mind the effect of capping on services. My hon. Friend the Minister said that, whenever capping is raised as a proposition, the local government units affected immediately shout and scream about the dire effects that the capping will have on the services that they seek to provide for the needy in the areas that they look after. Is it not the case, however, that even organisations such as the National and Local Government Officers Association now acknowledge that there is clear evidence that capping is not having anything like the effect that was threatened when the Government set out their capping proposals?

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): On his point about the popularity or otherwise of capping, is my hon. Friend aware that the Labour-controlled Coventry city council introduced an innovatory technique in the early 1980s when it decided to hold a local referendum in all the Coventry constituencies, asking, "Would you like to see a supplementary rate? Are you aware that we can only improve services by a supplementary rate?" None of the four Coventry constituencies voted less than 80 per cent. against any increase in expenditure. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is yet another verification of the fact that when people are asked whether they want unnecessary increases in expenditure for increases in services—when given a chance to express themselves—they invariably vote against such a proposition?

Mr. Mitchell: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his sensible and constructive intervention, demonstrating the critical point about accountability, which is at the heart of what so many of my hon. Friends

[Mr. Mitchell]

have said. My hon.Friend has also demonstrated that, when accountability is put to the test of public support, it receives that support every time.

Not only is capping popular, but it has been demonstrated that it does not have the dire effects that we were promised would be visited on authorities where it was used. I can do no better than quote from a survey on the likely effects of charge capping published by the newspaper of the National Association of Local Government Officers, *Public Service*, with which all of us are familiar. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has had to depart for a meeting with his constituents, but, according to the newspaper, in his constituency,

"No redundancies were anticipated."

The newspaper continued that, in Brent, there were

"No cuts required as a result of capping."

In Bristol, there were

"No redundancies, no cuts in services, no charge increases."

Calderdale was

"Holding growth, increasing some charges and cutting some non-essential services."

In Camden there were

"No cuts necessary. Cap was £4·4 million. Council said, 'Our income was sufficient for us not to need to make cuts.'"

In Greenwich there were

"Some redundancies expected, but no large-scale job cuts."

Lambeth

"Managed to avoid closure of front line services and no redundancies."

In Rochdale there were

"No compulsory redundancies."

Those are not the quotes of a Government Back Bencher, from the Department of the Environment or from one of its Ministers, but come from NALGO's own newspaper, and I have given them to the House as they appeared in it.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and acknowledging that Calderdale, my local authority, tried its best to minimise the effects of capping and, by and large, avoided compulsory redundancies. However, is he aware that, night after night in the local press, Tory councillors complain bitterly about swimming baths being closed, repairs not being done in schools and the many losses of services? Matters could have been worse had Calderdale not used balances and been careful about how it made the cuts. It cannot do that year after year.

Mr. Mitchell: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the effectiveness or otherwise of the way in which Calderdale runs those services——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The hon. Gentleman was doing just that.

Mr. Mitchell: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard, I was quoting from the NALGO newspaper. Any authority must seek to provide services for which the people they represent can afford to pay.

It has been widely argued that the Bill is an attempt to deal with the Lambeth loophole. Although I do not represent a London constituency, I am sure that all my hon. Friends were appalled when, after the court case, Lambeth councillors and the leader of Lambeth council literally danced on the steps of the town hall because of their delight at being able to send out to the people they purport to represent a larger bill than the Secretary of State wished them to do. That is one reason why, as the survey also clearly demonstrates, capping is popular in the country. Many of my constituents wished that Nottingham county council would be capped and could not understand why the Government did not do so.

That is why we must salute the outgoing Secretary of State for the Environment for the way in which he has made so clear the criteria that will apply this year and acknowledge that there are many people up and down the country who will be pleased that he is determined—and his successor is equally determined—that the effectiveness of proper capping should be seen to be clearly maintained and enhanced. It would not be right for the Secretary of State to go in and out of the courts over narrow points of law. The ground rules of this important system need to be set out well in advance.

In his opening speech, the Minister rightly made much play of accountability and the important fact that elections, the benchmark of accountability, are out of sync with the introduction of the community charge. My hon. Friend said that county councils will not have to stand for re-election until 1993, so that there is a long period before many of them will be brought to book for their high spending.

When looking at the exact terms and measures enshrined in the Bill, it is important to recognise that accountability is made much more difficult when two tiers of authority cost the bill every year. In my district we have a prudent, low-spending, effective, Conservative-controlled borough council which is responsible for only 10 per cent. of the community charge bill, and a high-spending Labour county council which is responsible for 90 per cent. of the cost.

My hon. Friend the Minister rightly described accountability as the benchmark of the Bill. It is also right to make it clear that, in a district such as that which I represent—Gedling—two tiers of authority make accountability much more difficult and blur the issue. The capping measure, which is tightened in the Bill, is essential to save charge payers from the high charges that can be imposed on them, particularly in districts such as Nottinghamshire, where it will be another three years before we can bring the high-spending county council to book.

When the review—the subject of Wednesday's debate in the House—takes place, I hope that Conservative Members will accept that the basic principle of the community charge is not at fault, but the heavy amount which people such as my constituents will have to pay. Almost no one in my constituency disputes the principle of the community charge, but many people do not believe that the amount charged can be, or should be, supported.

It is impossible to view the Bill in isolation and separate from the new review of the community charge now being undertaken. It is essential that, as part of that review, we consider local government structure and ensure that fundamental to any review is the notion of bringing local government as near as possible to those it seeks to serve. That should not be forgotten when we consider the review.

This short and technical Bill makes it absolutely clear that the local authority must pass on to its charge payers the reductions sought and granted under capping legislation. It is astonishing that any authority should not seek to do that. I am delighted that the Bill, which will, I hope, receive a Second Reading tonight, will ensure that there is no way that that cannot happen.

I am also delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister made it absolutely clear that he finds it appalling that some hon. Members are still not paying their community charge, thus entailing a loss of revenue to local services. It means that all too often people sponge off their less-well-off neighbours. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, it is astonishing that the Labour party, which claims to want to see bills reduced, is to oppose the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister talked about the control of public expenditure—and as though on cue he walks back into the Chamber. He made it absolutely clear that, while the Government have done a great deal to control their expenditure, local authorities have consistently failed to bring their high expenditure under control. He mentioned that in the past two years alone local government has increased its expenditure by 25 per cent. That is a formidable statistic which underlines the point that neither Conservative nor Labour Members have been able to grasp in recent years: local government expenditure remains uncontrolled and out of control. I believe that I was a former Member of this House, Dick Crossman, who said on the steps of one of our great town halls that the party was over in local government spending—*[Interruption.]* I may be wrong about that; if so, I am sure that it will be corrected by one of my hon. Friends. But, whether he said it or not, the party is not over. We have never been able to control local government expenditure effectively. My constituents have reached the point of demanding that it should be effectively controlled, and I very much hope that that fundamental point will be dealt with in the review.

The community charge and its introduction have been used as a scapegoat for higher expenditure by local authorities. The criteria for capping this year make it plain that local authorities will not be able to get away with that. I welcome that, just as I welcome the Bill. I wish it a speedy transition into law. It deals with only a small part of the major difficulty with the community charge that the Government must now address, but it makes a good contribution to that small part.

6.20 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): This debate arises out of the appeal of the Secretary of State against Lambeth. To judge from the contributions of Conservative Members, local authorities—especially Labour-controlled authorities seeking to protect services—are wicked.

It is as well to remind the House of what the judges who heard the appeal in the Court of Appeal said. Lord Justice Glidewell said:

> "In my view there can be circumstances in which a council can properly decide, provided it bases itself solely upon the information which was originally in its possession, to adopt as the basis of its second calculation a different non payment rate. I am not persuaded on the material before us that Lambeth's resolution on 6 August 1990 was a breach of Section 35(5). I would therefore dismiss the application."

Mr. Justice Otton said that the Lambeth councillors had approached

> "their task with the utmost care . . . What happened in August was the substitution of one reasonable decision for another",

said Lord Justice Mustill. He went on to say:

> "In the growing conflict now in progress between central and local government for the control of local taxation, central government has the whip hand because it initiates legislation."

That blows an almighty hole in the Government's argument about whom people should look to for accountability in the administration of their funds.

Yet again we see that the law is based not on morality but on the political will of the day. This legislation is about making sure that the Government's desire to destroy local authorities by cutting the money provided for services succeeds.

What does the Bill set out to do? The formula is as follows. Under the proposals, if a council is capped, the new poll tax will be calculated by using the formula: new poll tax equals old poll tax minus old budget minus capped budget divided by the relevant population. That is supposed to make local authority finance more understandable, more accountable and simpler.

Furthermore, when an authority is capped and there is also a capped authority that precepts on it, the council has to calculate and undertake a separate substitution. That is what happens in Avon. Avon county council and Bristol city council are capped authorities. The problem with the formula is that it is based on various other decisions that continue to compound the agonising problems that local authorities face. For instance, the Government assume a 100 per cent. collection rate when the new poll tax rate is set, yet we know full well that 100 per cent. of the poll tax is not collected—just as the rates were never fully collected.

It is an important feature of this system of central Government support that the needs of assessment for an authority and its grant entitlement are established with no reference to the extent and quality of the services that it actually provides. For instance, an authority with no museums, art galleries or public parks, with no programme of support for the arts, and with no crematoria, will be in no way worse off under its SSA than an authority that provides those services.

Bristol was poll tax-capped last year by £10 million. If it spends on a standstill budget next year, it will need to spend about £62 million, but the Government have set Bristol's SSA at £41 million. So the council has to cut one third—£21 million—of its budget to comply with the SSA.

To meet that shortfall, Bristol council officers are recommending that members consider the closure of all swimming pools in the authority, the closure and selling off of Colston hall, which is the main concert and arts centre apart from the Old Vic, and the selling off of all open space. The planning committee has suggested that all concessionary bus fares be stopped and that we should phase out paying the charges for giro payments, which are paid for now by the local authority——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Is not the hon. Lady being had by the oldest trick in the book? Surely she is the victim of precisely what the Minister outlined in his speech. Of course officers will always draw up the most unpalatable and dreadful list of possible cuts, but did not the evidence that I produced from the NALGO newspaper demonstrate that when it comes to it, sensible economies can be made without implementing the sort of swingeing cuts proposed by the officers that the hon. Lady mentioned?

Ms. Primarolo: I am not persuaded by the hon. Gentleman's arguments or by his quotations from the NALGO newspaper. I should like to take a look at them. In view of the unfairness of the basic calculations in relation to Bristol city council, I do not think that I am being "had". Avon county council was poll tax-capped last

[Ms. Primarolo]

year and has to cut £26 million from this year's standstill budget if it is to avoid poll tax capping this year. That is a substantial amount.

The SSA for Bristol is calculated per adult head of population and that enters the formula for the setting of the new poll tax after capping. For Bristol it is £139 per head, compared with an average of £163 per head for what are referred to as the big nine, the nine large district authorities. Leicester, which has a population considerably smaller that that of Bristol, has an SSA of £236 per head. The figure for Nottingham is £184. However, Bristol, Leicester and Nottingham are all in the family of the big nine authorities. I am not questioning the amount that other authorities should receive, but merely pointing out how little Bristol receives.

The Average SSA per head for the big nine is 26 per cent. For Bristol it is 23 per cent. and for Leicester, which has the highest SSA, it is 31 per cent. The Secretary of State takes the view that the standard level of district services costs 70 per cent. more in Leicester than it does in Bristol. It is inconceivable that exactly the same services in Leicester should cost 70 per cent. more than in Bristol. The formula, which is acceptable to the Government, is crazy and Bristol is disadvantaged.

On that formula, the SSA produces for Leicester £46·3 million for an adult population of 196,000 whereas for Bristol it produces only £40·9 million for a population of 294,000. That same population formula will be used yet again to penalise Bristol if the political parties there are unable to identify £21 million worth of cuts. Local authorities are accountable to the electorate to provide services. The Government take the view that accountability is about making local government the puppet of their political will regardless of the views of local electorates.

The Government claimed that the poll tax was introduced to protect charge payers. It does not protect women in Bristol who have no income whatever but have to pay the poll tax. It is no protection for women there who will not receive services from carers, nor does it protect young mothers who have nowhere to take their children because the adventure playgrounds have been closed. The complexities and costs of the scheme work against local authorities. In Bristol it costs £5 million more to collect the poll tax than it did to collect rates under the old system. Less than 70 per cent. of people pay the poll tax.

The Government tell Avon and Bristol authorities to impose cuts and at the same time they impose legal duties. Those are the extra duties contained in the Education Reform Act 1988 and in what is left of the pitiful community care policy. Extra duties are also contained in the Children Act 1989 and there are extra but welcome duties in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. All those duties mean that local authorities have to spend money, and they are having to impose disproportionate cuts in other areas.

Avon is a joint police authority with Somerset. The precept percentage that the Home Office allows the police authority compulsorily to extract from a county council that is poll tax-capped is greater than the percentage by which the Department of the Environment is allowing Avon to increase its spending.

The Bill is not about dealing with excessive budgets, nor is it in the best interests of the poll tax payer. It is not about accountability or about making the system easier. It is about destroying the services provided through local authorities by democratically elected councillors. Councillors all over Britain, regardless of their political persuasion, are finding it impossible to continue to provide services. Millions of people are simply unable to pay the poll tax.

A flat rate head tax is no substitute for a tax that is based on ability to pay. We should provide services based on need and not on the ability to pay for them. That exposes the Government's squalid action. They seek to pursue a tax that they no longer support and no doubt they will attempt further to amend it or scrap it so that they can save face at the next general election. That will not work. People despise the poll tax and will continue to oppose it. They will go on fighting for the services that they need, and that means opposing these additional measures.

6.36 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I understood that the advantages of the community charge were the simplicity and clarity which make it easily understood by the public. All our constituents know that the community charge is so much per head. That is clear to our constituents even if it is painful, and is much plainer than the strange concept of poundage on the notional rental value of their homes, which is theoretically calculated on a rental value produced in 1972.

The debate is about the tinkering with the documents of the community charge figures by Lambeth council in particular. Those figures are not easily understood by the general public. The figures concerned are the variables between the precepts and the final cash charge to community charge payers. Those precepts are the precepts of the county council, those of the borough or district council and those of the parish council etc.

The first variable is the safety net, about which there have been many rows. Every community charge payer in the borough of Greenwich is subsidised by the national charge payer to the tune of £212 per head. Southwark's charge payers are subsidised by £160 per head, while in Hammersmith and Fulham the subsidy is £111 per head. Despite that, all three councils are levying a high charge. It is odd that the Government have said that we should subsidise incompetent Labour councils at the expense of competent Conservative councils.

Ms. Mahon: What about Westminster? The hon. Gentleman should tell us about its external grant.

Mr. Arnold: Every community charge payer in Conservative Westminster has this year been paying into the safety net a surcharge of £75. That also applies to the charge payers in Kensington and Chelsea, Wokingham, South Buckinghamshire and Chiltern. All those district council areas, in which the voters are intelligent enough to vote Conservative, have nevertheless been ripped off to subsidise incompetent Labour councils. Even in the Conservative-controlled district of Gravesham, community charge payers are being ripped off to the tune of £15. Councils such as Lambeth are not able to tinker with the safety net, because that has been determined by the Government. Those of us who represent constituencies that have had to contribute to the rip-off this year are delighted to know that next year the imposition will be lifted from our constituents.

The only other variable with which councils such as Lambeth may tinker is the collection account. That is what we are talking about within the narrow confines of the Bill. Lambeth borough council varied the collection account contributions during the year for political ends. The collection account contribution is not a balancing item for account manipulation by councillors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) referred to the dancing on the steps of Lambeth town hall when the council achieved its narrow legal victory in the courts. It was a response to political imperatives and not to the fact that the sort of community charge being levied by Labour-controlled Lambeth borough council was far too heavy for the people of Lambeth to bear, especially for those under the most financial pressure, about whom the Labour party likes to talk but for whom it seems never to act. It is on the collection account that the shortfalls in collection are to be seen.

What about the charge made on individuals within the component total figure for the collection account? This year, every council in the land has inevitably had to estimate what funds it would have to raise to make up the shortfall arising from late payment or no payment. Next year, when councils come to work out how much should be charged per head to the collection fund, they will be able to do so on the basis of a track record. The various track records are now becoming evident.

The figures of collection by August provide us with a guide to competence. By the end of August, an average of 83 per cent. of the charge payers within good Conservative-collecting authorities had already paid up towards the community charge. In Labour authorities, there was already a disparity, because on average they were collecting from only 74 per cent. of charge payers.

Ms. Primarolo: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why Bath, which is a Conservative council, has achieved a collection rate below 70 per cent.? Is that because it is an incompetent Conservative council?

Mr. Arnold: If the hon. Lady were to examine the figures, she would find that Bath is already well up the table. Underneath it, with lower collection figures, are Labour-controlled councils which are to be counted by the dozen.

A study undertaken by *The Guardian* found that the worst four collecting authorities were all Labour-controlled. At the end of August, Hackney had collected from only 56 per cent. of its charge payers. In other words, 44 per cent. of charge payers in Hackney had paid nothing. In Liverpool, 42 per cent. had paid nothing.

In Lambeth, the very borough with which we are concerned, 40 per cent. had paid nothing. That is not especially surprising, because the council has still not collected the full rates income for the final year of the rating system, as it had not for years previous to that. I believe that the shortfall goes back to the financial year 1984-85. That is the last year for which Labour-controlled Lambeth had completed its accounts.

Ms. Primarolo: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that non-payment rates are more likely to be connected, or connected entirely, with people's ability to pay, and that the areas to which he has referred are those in which there is great social stress and increasing poverty? Surely those factors would account for many non-payers, or a large proportion of them. There are many who simply cannot afford the poll tax.

Mr. Arnold: That argument will not wash. The hon. Lady has not mentioned that the community charge rebate covers a greater proportion of payers than did the rate rebate. She will find no correlation between non-payers and poor people. If she examines the curve of effective net amount to pay, she will find that those who are at the bottom of the financial pile are not those most heavily impacted by the community charge.

The hon. Lady referred to the borough of Bath and its collection. At the end of September, 77·1 per cent. of the charge payers of Bath had paid up their community charge. She did not mention, for obvious reasons, that in Bristol, which has an incompetent Labour council, only 65 per cent. had paid up. I wonder whether the hon. Lady has been encouraging her constituents to abide by the law and pay up.

Mr. Wareing: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that I have paid no poll tax to Westminster city council. He might wonder why I have not. That "efficient" Lady Porter-led Conservative council managed to send out my demand form only last week. Has the hon. Gentleman undertaken any research to ascertain how many councils, such as inefficient Westminster council, which is so busy selling cemeteries, have not got round to sending out demand notices?

Mr. Arnold: As the hon. Gentleman has referred to his own position, perhaps he will tell the House about his arrivals and departures to and from addresses and whether those movements have any bearing on the late arrival of his demand notice.

Mr. Wareing: I have been at the same address for over three years.

Mr. Arnold: I cannot account for the late arrival of the notice. I shall check the level of collection of Westminster city council, which no doubt is very much higher than that which has been achieved by the borough in the constituency which the hon. Gentleman represents.

In Nottingham, 30 per cent. of charge payers has not begun to pay by the end of August. I suppose it is not surprising to find that the collection record of a litany of Labour-controlled cities and boroughs is a low one. Labour councils and Labour Members give little or no encouragement to people to abide by the law and pay the bills for their public services.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important for Ministers to consider in their review of the charge and its administration the fact that non-payment of the charge, which produces a shortfall, should not be passed on to the law-abiding majority to pay the following year, and that possibly the capping mechanism that we are debating should take account of the failure of councils to raise that money? Instead of the law-abiding majority having to pay for the malingerers, spending should be cut to provide for the shortfall.

Mr. Arnold: I think that what the law should provide, for, and what all councils should do, with enthusiasm and energy, is the pursuit of non-payers. There is no doubt that it is immoral for certain people not to pay the community charge and to expect the remainder of the public to foot

[Mr. Arnold]

the bill. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of councils have got on with the job of collection. The figures show that over 90 per cent. of charge payers are paying their community charge. That is not dissimilar to the proportion of those who were paying rates at this stage of the financial year.

Some effective Conservative authorities are doing far better than the average. For example, Medina, on the Isle of Wight, has estimated that it has already collected from 96 per cent. of its community charge payers. Poole, in Dorset, claims 93 per cent. I congratulate the Conservative-controlled Gravesham borough council on already achieving a 93 per cent. collection rate. That is well ahead of the average.

The rate of collection and the effect on the collection account will be reflected in the contribution that is levied next year by the collecting authorities. Then the chickens will come home to roost. Labour councils have been the most inefficient and the least co-operative and, as always, they pass on the bill to their charge payers. It will be interesting to compare the charge levied next year by high-charging Labour councils and that levied by low-charging Conservative councils.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Does my hon. Friend accept that the blame should be attached not only to Labour-controlled councils, but to those misguided individuals who have led non-payment campaigns, such as that in Swanscombe in my constituency? Such people need taking to task for bombarding innocent people and persuading them not to pay the tax, in pursuit of some misguided fiscal notion.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend has cases in his constituency, as I have in Gravesham borough, of people not paying their community charge. One Labour councillor in Gravesham is not paying her community charge and is therefore passing on the cost of local services to her neighbours, whether or not they are poorer than she is. There is a deafening silence from the Labour group on the council, which says that it is nothing to do with them, as there is a deafening silence from the Opposition Front Bench.

Charge capping is sadly necessary because of such actions. It protects residents from Labour councils' irresponsible control of finance. People want that protection. Last April, Gallup conducted a poll to determine whether people wanted charge capping. It is interesting to note that 53 per cent. of the public want a limit on the extravagant spending of local authorities. It is a salutary comment upon the Labour party that 43 per cent. of Labour voters want charge capping. It is obvious that the Opposition Front Bench is out of touch with Labour voters.

All voters, including Labour voters, are right to fear the possibilities. The rip-offs are evident. I shall cite the original announced intentions of Labour councils before their charge payers were saved by capping. Were it not for the generosity of the Government's safety net, people in the London borough of Greenwich this year would be paying £620. In fact, other charge payers are subsidising Greenwich residents to the tune of no less than £212 per head. Greenwich has a traditionally wasteful Labour council.

Lambeth, which we are discussing today, has a real rip-off of £575, not the original £548 that it tried to levy on local people. Haringey's rate is £573. Southwark would have had to charge £550, were it not for a subsidy of £160. Hammersmith and Fulham would have levied a charge of £535, but for the safety net contribution of £111. I could go on and on. The only consistent link between those authorities is their tradition of Labour dominance.

If we want to contrast the behaviour of Conservative and Labour councils, we have only to wander through the shire counties. In Avon, Bristol's real charge is £513. The other councils, invariably Conservative, average £400. In Cambridgeshire, Labour-controlled Cambridge council charges £376 and Labour-controlled Peterborough £345. The Conservative-controlled districts in the county have an average charge of £280. In Essex, Labour-controlled Basildon scores £440 and Labour-controlled Harlow £420. The largely Conservative remainder score in the low three hundreds.

In Hertfordshire, Labour-controlled Stevenage grabs £410 and Labour-controlled Welwyn and Hatfield £396. The remainder charge £330. Labour-controlled Leicester charges £429, while the remainder of the county districts charge £340. Labour-controlled Norwich charges £365, while the remainder of Norfolk charges about £300. Labour-controlled Crawley charges £332. Liberal-controlled Adur also charges £332, but the Liberals are not worried about the people of Adur—no Liberal Democrat spokesman has turned up for this debate. The remainder of the West Sussex districts charge about £270.

In Greater London, Westminster's real community charge is not the laudable £195 that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has not got around to paying; it is actually only £120 without the maximum safety net levy of £75. The London borough of Croydon sets a real rate of £225 without its safety net contribution. Those are Conservative councils in action, charging a low community charge and giving better value to their charge payers. In the metropolitan boroughs—sadly, almost entirely controlled by Labour—the lowest real community charge levy is by Conservative-controlled Trafford at £268.

Charge capping has saved people real money. In Hammersmith and Fulham, the Government have saved every charge payer £99 this year. In Southwark, the figure is £86; in Greenwich, £65; in Barnsley, £59; and in Derbyshire, £56. That affects real people. They must reflect upon the fact that their Labour councils hammered them regardless, but that this Conservative Government have saved them from such irresponsible charging.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am interested in the comparisons that the hon. Gentleman is drawing. Perhaps he would comment on his Department's suggested average charge for the coming year of £380, compared with £278 this year. How does he justify that 33⅓ per cent. increase for every poll tax payer in the country?

Mr. Arnold: The figure is based on the standard spending assessment suggested by the Government. It is for councils to decide whether they need to spend up to that assessment. Neither my county nor my borough expects to be banging on that limit.

Inherent in what the hon. Gentleman is saying is the fact that Labour councils cannot save money. Let us consider the facts and the track record of Labour councils.

We need go no further than the London borough of Brent, and I need only quote the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). In August, he wrote in *New Socialist:*

"If you have a council that is as monumentally incompetent as Brent's been in the last few years, it rightly gets a major role of censure from the public."

For once, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The people of Brent threw out the Labour council last May. The incoming Conservative/Liberal Democrat administration had to ask an audit team to investigate how, under a Labour-controlled authority, £4 million of books had disappeared from the borough's libraries during the previous four years. Books had been disappearing at a rate of almost 2,000 a week, with a loss to each Brent charge payer of almost £21.

Mr. Holt: As a former member of Brent council, I remind my hon. Friend that Brent town hall used to be the town hall in Wembley. It was built in 1938 and had been fully paid for by the time Brent came into being. It was then sold and leased back to the Labour administration so that it would have more money to spend on its wildcat schemes. The community charge payers of Brent would have been much better off if there had never been a Labour administration.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend is right. That kind of financial jiggery-pokery was repeated time and again by Labour councils throughout the country, who had the funny idea that they could spend today and somehow be looked after tomorrow—presumably by an incoming Labour Government. It is clear that there will be no Labour Government, and those chickens are coming home to roost for the charge payers in the boroughs concerned. They certainly do not like what they see.

Camden council spent £70,000 per year on a lesbian day centre, and Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council held a party to celebrate Nelson Mandela's birthday at a cost to local charge payers of £2,000. Derbyshire also spends more than £1 million on its information services and local newspaper, £600,000 on its equal opportunities and race relations unit, and £111,000 on giving councillors free trips abroad to sponsor twinning agreements.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is my hon. Friend also aware that, of the total staff employed by Derbyshire education authority, fewer than half are teachers? Most of the money is spent on administration, advisers, and all the rest of the paraphernalia with which the county council seems to think education should be surrounded.

Mr. Arnold: That speaks for itself. Not only is Derbyshire levying a high community charge, but, as my hon. Friend has clearly shown, charge payers are not getting value for even that vast amount of money, because most of the budget goes on the administration of which Socialists are so fond.

The squeamish might not like to hear that Labour-controlled Islington borough council is offering free condoms to residents who are going abroad on holiday.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The council is not operating that scheme. It has been withdrawn.

Mrs. Currie: Withdrawn? Is the hon. Gentleman sure?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I am sure. I made a point of checking—*[Laughter.]* Perhaps I should rephrase that. Condoms are no longer being made available, and when they were, that was done under the health education programme, with Islington struggling to retain staff, and finding that very difficult under poll tax capping. Nevertheless, it was provided with Government money to employ nine people to work on that particular function.

Mr. Arnold: It seems that, until such matters are exposed—if that is the right word—Labour councils just blunder on. Apparently it never occurred to that Labour authority that people able to afford a holiday overseas would also be able to afford their own condoms.

How many people are aware that Labour-controlled Southwark council has been spending £100,000 a year of charge payers' money on a trade union support unit—whatever that might do? How many people are aware also that Southwark's lesbian and gay unit, in partnership with Labour-controlled Lewisham council, held a leadership, gay consultation and cultural evening with a buffet, cabaret and disco? That is the kind of event on which Labour likes to spend money—and then it sends the public the bill.

The community charge has become a matter of controversy in recent days, but it has highlighted council spending and competence. It could be argued that the community charge is working because it allows the public to see what their councils are up to, and to respond accordingly. Last May, the electorate chucked out incompetent councils such as Brent, which was roundly condemned by the hon. Member for Brent, East. Labour councils were also chucked out at Ealing, and at Hillingdon.

It is a pity that capping is necessary, but the Bill will close a loophole that has possibly made that device somewhat ineffective.

7.4 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Perhaps it is appropriate that I should follow the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), because, although we are not witnessing the burial of the poll tax today, we are seeing the beginning of the funeral procession, as some of the remarks about my own borough of Lambeth have illustrated.

One or two hon. Members said that Labour councillors were dancing on the steps of Lambeth town hall when the courts upheld a poll tax of £522 against a Government figure of £493. That shows why the poll tax has failed, and the Bill is a measure of its failure. Every Government of every political complexion of the past 20 years has been concerned about local government expenditure. I know that that is true from the time when I was a Minister. The present Government took the matter somewhat more seriously, because this is the 50th or 51st piece of local government finance legislation that they have introduced since taking office. The Government have been at pains time and again to limit by statute the amount that councils can raise by rates or, now, by the poll tax.

The Government have grown tired of rate capping because it involves detailed interference in local authority planning. The only good thing that can be said for the poll tax is that it brought the Government to the conclusion that such decisions should be taken not by central Government but by the electorate. The purpose of the poll tax was to allow electors to choose. Incidentally, I do not

[Mr. John Fraser]

believe that there is any political mileage in knocking on doors in my constituency and saying, "I think that the poll tax should be much higher than it is." I have enough experience and political sense not to do that—and I saw what happened to those of my political friends who did, such as Eric Deakins in Walthamstow. One does not go around arguing for much higher poll tax.

The Government reached the conclusion that control of local government expenditure ought to rest not with central Government but with the electorate, which was the thinking behind the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Before the people of Lambeth voted in May's council elections, they knew what the poll tax would be. The figure decided upon by Lambeth council was £548, and that forecast by the Government in a written answer two years ago was £547, so the council was only £1 out. In constituencies such as Streatham, there was a Labour swing of 10 per cent., and Labour also captured council seats in my constituency. I do not say that that pattern was repeated throughout London, but the electorate were happy to make their decision from one borough to another. The sign of failure is that the Government were not prepared to stand by the electorate's judgment. Lambeth is a case in point. The people knew what the level of poll tax would be, yet the Government chose to interfere with that democratic choice.

Earlier this year, the former Secretary of State for the Environment said that he intended to limit Lambeth borough council's budget, and I asked the right hon. Gentleman whether he was sure that limiting the council's level of expenditure was the same thing as limiting its poll tax. My legal advice was that the two were not the same, and it transpires that I was right and that the then Secretary of State was wrong.

I believe that I know why he was wrong. I think that, when the Government drafted the poll tax legislation, they did not intend to introduce capping. If I remember rightly, capping was imposed at quite a late stage during the passage of the legislation. It was an afterthought because the then Government believed that it was not necessary and that the electorate would take the appropriate action. Quite apart from the basic inequity of the tax, the fact that that strategy has failed shows that the Bill is part of the Act's burial, because the automaticity of control of local government expenditure by the electorate, rather than by Government, failed.

Earlier in the debate, the problems of Lambeth and its failure to collect the rates were mentioned. I do not excuse that failure. People come to me with rate demands which in some cases go back seven or eight years. Sometimes they make many visits to the local rates office and they end up with a rates bill which varies from £2,000, in my mother's case—she has been to the rates office about 20 times—to £7,000. I do not excuse that sort of inefficiency. It causes me a lot of worry when people receive bills which go back such a long time.

Some local authorities had low levels of rate collection in the past and have a low level of poll tax collection at present. We need to ask ourselves why the collection levels are so low and why some boroughs meet such difficulties. There are a number of reasons which I think that the Government have not fully understood.

I represent the second most deprived borough in the country. Poverty stalks many parts of the borough, so there is bound to be a low poll tax payment because people simply cannot afford to pay. Old-age pensioners and people on income support have to find £12 a month to pay their water rates, never mind the amount that they have to find for poll tax. Until the Government changed the housing benefit rules by introducing capital disqualifications, almost half the population in my borough—including many owner-occupiers—received housing benefits. On many council estates almost a quarter of all tenants were in receipt of income support.

Therefore, the borough has a huge level of poverty and dependency upon state benefits—income support, housing benefit and the like. If we add to that the great mobility in such boroughs, we get some idea of the problem. A good exercise is to compare the electoral register from one year to another as it gives some idea of how many people move in and out of the borough in that time. In my constituency between 16 per cent. and 20 per cent. of the population change, and the percentage is probably higher in other parts of the borough.

We have a combination of a high level of poverty and great mobility. That is why it is so difficult to work out housing benefit. Added to that, the Government are constantly changing the housing benefit rules. It becomes almost impossible to keep up with rate rebate, housing benefit, and poll tax rebate calculations due to that combination of poverty and mobility. That is why the collection level is so low, although I agree that it is not the only reason.

Therefore, the local authority quite reasonably assumed that it ought to calculate for a lower level of collection than had previously been anticipated, and that assumption was confirmed by the courts. It was not an unreasonable decision—no one could have foreseen the rate of collection in Lambeth, Bath or anywhere else.

The result of the Bill will be that the reduction in budget will be translated into a reduction in poll tax. Incidentally, I do not have any difficulty in understanding a simple arithmetical equation. I would have hoped that the hon. Member who aspires to be the leader of the Liberal party would not have so much difficulty with algebra. The arithmetic is simply stated in the Bill, and I have no objection to the algebraic formula.

In real life, the problem is that, if the Government translate the budget reduction into a poll tax reduction, and there continues to be a low level of collection, the consequence will be a double cut in local services. There will be one cut because the budget is depressed and a subsequent cut because the collection level will decrease and services will not be supported.

Do not let anyone be deceived that services have not been cut, and that such cuts are not causing great problems in our boroughs. In my borough, as in many others, swimming pools are closed every morning at a time when they should be used by schools and unemployed people because it is simply not possible to keep them open. Almost all the voluntary organisations are facing across-the-board cuts because of capping. Other essential services are also being cut, and it does not merely apply to Lambeth—exactly the same is happening in Wandsworth, without poll tax capping.

Wandsworth has a form of poll tax capping because it is under pressure to keep the poll tax down, in exactly the same way as Lambeth is statutorily bound to do so. The

same thing is happening in Wandsworth—voluntary organisations are being penalised, care schemes for children have been cut, free law centres have been closed, and a whole range of services, which have been supported by the Conservative council for many years, have been reduced.

The consequence of the Bill will be two kinds of cuts—one caused by the reduction in budget, and the second by a low level of collection of the tax, which in turn flows from the poverty created by the Government. In my borough, unemployment is now three times as high as it was when the Government took office in 1979.

Today, we are witnessing the beginning of the funeral procession for the tax. It is true that the undertaker was unable to speak today—he had to send his assistant along. However, by the time we debate the subject on Wednesday, I hope that, if we cannot see the funeral procession, at least the burial will be in sight.

7.16 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The Bill gives further legislative basis for limiting local authority spending and therefore puts a mechanism in place to protect those whom I know are officially called charge payers, although I am quite happy to call them poll tax payers. The House has a duty to protect our constituents, and the Bill does so.

Given what happened in the city of Nottingham and the county of Nottinghamshire upon imposition of the first year's tax, I have no hesitation in supporting the Bill. The chairmen of the city finance committee and of the county finance committee wrapped themselves in the proverbial cold towels to try to see how high they could set spending without breaching what they estimated to be the ceiling or the cap that the Secretary of State would impose once he had seen the figures that they set for their first poll tax levy. I know that is more than a mere rumour, and I am happy to try to protect my constituents until such time as the issue can be reviewed, and we can put it properly on track.

The principle that central Government have a duty and a proper responsibility to control the totality of public spending is not in dispute. Opposition Members keep crying that we are interfering with local government spending. They seem somehow to ignore the fact that local government spending is a part of public spending, and, it is right and proper that the House should have a say in it.

I think that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—in what capacity I cannot recall—years ago made a major speech and made it very clear that the House had that responsibility. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who said that he was a Minister at the time, will agree that, when the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) was Secretary of State for the Environment, he operated a voluntary system of constraint. In those days, most local authorities—certainly Nottingham city council—were Conservative-controlled.

I was one of Nottingham's councillors, and, given the financial mess into which the Labour Government had got themselves, that move seemed perfectly right and proper. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney—using, I believe, the usual method of issuing circulars—sought to rein in spending in the middle of the year, and we were all asked to exercise constraint. At the end of the year, largely owing to the co-operation of Conservative councils throughout the country, the Labour Government managed to recover some £1,000 million. Given that all this happened 13 years ago, I think that the House will agree that that was a very large sum to recover by means of a voluntary clawback.

The sad fact is that—as the hon. Member for Norwood pointed out—the present Government did not receive the same voluntary co-operation from local authorities. That is why they had to embark on a legislative scheme to limit authorities' spending. I believe that it is largely the conduct of Labour authorities that has brought about this sad but necessary process; I am only sorry that we did not impose a tough spending limit in year one. I am not sure, even now, that the cap is tight enough to protect many of our long-suffering constituents.

Many hon. Members have been in politics for a long time, either in the House or in local government. I do not recall a single occasion on which an opportunity has arisen to raise extra money on the quiet—because of, for instance, a boundary change or a revaluation—when local authorities have not used their opposition to change to jack up their charges on local people. I confess that has been done on both sides of the political fence: every local politician, regardless of his political colour, has his pet projects. Following a revaluation, we knew exactly what would happen. It used to be an extra couple of coppers; now money is no object.

We knew from experience that this changeover would mean people being crippled by additional charges. I am sorry that my senior colleagues did not see the obvious at the time, but that is all water under the bridge; we are now trying to address the current problem. I know that I am oversimplifying matters, and I acknowledge the force of all the arguments about reserves, balances and so forth. Nevertheless, I think that I am right in saying that, if local authorities had been told last year, "You may spend everything that you spent last year, plus the rate of inflation"—which would have protected every teacher, every nursery nurse and every other worthwhile social provision—£2,500 million less would have been levied on our taxpayers in April. Limits on spending all over the country would have prevented that excessive spending.

The Opposition tell us that we should not limit local authority expenditure. I believe that the sum that I have mentioned works out at about £70 for each adult in the country. I can tell the House that my constituents would have been delighted to pay £70 less than they did. Some form of capping must be imposed this year to stop a repetition of that, and to protect our constituents from the consequences of the gay abandon with which local authorities have been spending other people's money.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that last year's community charge in Nottinghamshire could have been £290, perhaps £300, but it was set at £390. Within two weeks, 10,000 people in the city of Nottingham had signed a petition welcoming the possibility of the then Secretary of State's imposing a cap on the city and the country.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that Nottingham should reduce its poll tax charge. He must be aware that Nottinghamshire county council is wrestling with itself to save 12 elderly people's homes from closure. What does he expect Nottinghamshire people to go without to keep those homes open?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing the county council's disgusting conduct to the attention of the House. I am glad that he has brought it up, because, if he had not, I should have done so myself. I think that the council's conduct is just about the most disgraceful act by a local authority of which I have ever heard.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) knows very well that, since his party has been in charge in Nottinghamshire, some 5,000 more employees have been put on the payroll. The council cannot introduce that volume of staffing and then say that it cannot afford to keep old people's homes open.

Labour Members are right in saying that, as a result of the £390 charge, seven out of 10 of my constituents are worse off. If, however, the charge had been £290 or £300 —as any reasonable person who examines the books will know that it could have been—seven out of 10 families in my constituency would have gained. I do not wish to use the "gainers and losers" argument in relation to the Bill; suffice it to say that, as the hon. Member for Ashfield knows very well—he has read it in our local press, and heard the chairman of finance speaking on the radio—his council set a charge that included, over and above its previous year's expenditure, an additional spending programme of £104 million, spread over four years. It is interesting to note that that period is the same as the lifetime of the Labour authority. The additional spending was to be "front-loaded" into the first couple of years, which meant an extra charge of £147 for every adult in the city and county of Nottingham.

The old people's home in my constituency was not opened only last year; it has been there for 30 years. It is a super place. It is well run and the people love it: it is part of the community. It must have been part of Labour's budget before the extra £104 million was stuck on. The money is clearly there, but Labour has different priorities. Labour says, "To hell with the old people." We have seen the same thing time and again. This side of the House is often accused of knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing, but at least we on Conservative Benches do not play jiggery-pokery with the lives of our elderly people. Opposition Members do not give a damn. If the Opposition can make their point, that is the way they will play it.

We have to protect innocent people in our constituencies who are affected by unreasonably high poll tax charges. I wanted accountability; I wanted the voters in my constituency to know that the bill that came through their door was something for them to decide. However efficient or inefficient the city of Nottingham may be, the problem is that more than 80 per of the bill that comes through the door is set by Nottingham county council. The sooner the city of Nottingham runs its own affairs, separate from the county, hallelujah—the better it will be.

I said earlier that I am concerned about whether the Bill goes far enough. My fears arises partly out of the experience in Lambeth. Lambeth council argued that it was entitled to take a different view of the information that was in front of it when it set the budget. When the Government said that they wanted to cap Lambeth, the council said that it wanted to look again at its information. We allowed Lambeth to take, as it put it, a different view.

Having done that, the council argued that it did not have to pass on the full benefit of budget reductions to its poll tax payers. The point has already been made, but it is worth making again, that, if central Government give local authorities more money, which they spend on other projects, the poor old poll tax payer is landed with the same bill. It is just more spending that results in no benefit to the community charge payer.

What also worries me is the problem caused by those who will not pay. I have no doubt that there are many people who cannot pay. We shall want to look at their cases carefully. I have much sympathy for those who, for a variety of reasons, find themselves in circumstances for which they could not have been expected to budget. I refer to the budgeting of two people; I do not refer to the three, four or five-person households. That is a separate argument. If there are five wage earners in a house, they should all pay. The ordinary two-person household that finds itself with a bill that it could not have anticipated falls into the category of those who cannot at this stage find the full amount. However, I have no sympathy whatever for the "won't pay" brigade.

To illustrate my point, like most of my hon. Friends I, together with other Conservative party workers, deliver party literature. That is how we try to get our message across to our constituents. When I visited one of the council estates in my constituency—it is the second largest in the United Kingdom—I stopped some distance away from a beautiful house. It was clear that the owners had bought it under the right-to-buy legislation. It was a corner house, so it stood the maximum chance of enhancement. There was a beautiful wrought-iron gate in the run-up to the front door, another beautiful double wrought-iron gate had been provided for the garage, the house had been excellently rendered and there was delightful stone edging down the side of the drive. I stood back and thought, "Smashing."

Mrs. Currie: And my hon. Friend thought, "I'll get a nice big contribution here."

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend does not know how wrong she is. I thought that they had done a magnificent job on the house. I am neither a surveyor nor an architect, but I know that the average family on that estate spend £5,000 on their house when they purchase it. I thought to myself, "I bet these people didn't get much change out of £10,000." However, as I walked down the path to deliver my literature I saw in the window a "won't pay" sticker. It illustrated beyond argument that there is a substantial number of "won't payers". No hon. Member should sympathise with the "won't payers". There is a big difference between those who will not pay and those who cannot pay.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Just because the hon. Gentleman saw that the people who lived in that house had put a "won't pay" sticker in the window, why does he draw the conclusion that that family can afford to pay the poll tax? The hon. Gentleman said that those council house tenants must have purchased their home and spent money on it. They may, however, have fallen on hard times and found it difficult to make their poll tax payments. Why is the hon. Gentleman so patronising about people who live in council houses on council house estates?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am not being patronising.

Mr. Turner: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is being patronising.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No, I am not. I am proud to say that 5,000 of the 9,000 properties on that estate have been bought. I say, "Well done," to those home owners; I am delighted. I hope and pray that in due time the remaining 4,000 council house tenants will have the same chance to buy their homes. Even those who rent their homes have full security of tenure as a result of this Government's legislation. Many council house tenants look after their homes as if they were their own. Sometimes one cannot tell the difference between the two. I am delighted for them all. It is first-class.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) asks how it is that I know that someone who lives in a very nice house can afford to pay the poll tax. Is that right?

Mr. Turner: Yes.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Is not that precisely the argument against the property tax that you lot want to go back to? How can the Opposition say that because someone lives in a nice house, it follows that he or she has lots of money? The Opposition cannot have it both ways.

Mr. O'Brien: I must put the hon. Gentleman right. He has been misled by the information that he has had from the Tory Central Office. Labour's policy is to introduce a rebate scheme to take into consideration the plight of those who cannot afford to pay the poll tax. Does the hon. Gentleman support the poll tax or does he disagree with it? Does he believe that those who cannot pay should not be included in the scheme? What is he on about?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman ought to return to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I wish to stick to the terms of the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that you would not wish me to be accused of ducking the question. To the principle that every adult should pay something, I say, absolutely yes. I do not believe that the people in the house that I described fall into the category of people who cannot pay. Their poster said "won't pay". There is a difference between "won't" and "can't".

Those who will not pay impose a burden on the bulk of the population who wish to abide by the law and pay their dues to society. Rumour has it in the city and county of Nottingham that in order to make up for those who do not pay, my constituents will land up with a bill that is £50 a head more than would otherwise have been the case. That is completely unacceptable. My constituents deserve protection from highway robbery.

The Government are seeking to limit spending. What bothers me is that, having limited spending, they will not be able to translate the legislation into a limit on the community charge that the local authority sets. If, for example, the local authority says, "Our spending will mean a charge of £300, but because we do not want to pursue collection we shall charge everybody £350," will the Bill offer the protection that I am seeking?

I understand that if a large excess were levied on the poll tax payer merely to cover non-payers, my constituents may be protected by the district auditor or by an audit of some kind. I am not sure that is such a quick and clean process. I earnestly ask my hon. Friend the Minister to address that problem. If, after we have passed useful legislation that gives local authorities the criteria by which they can spend—we have made generous support settlements; nobody can say that the Treasury has not undone the purse strings and coughed up a fair slice of the cake to ensure that local authorities can meet the criteria—they impose a charge cover the non-payers, we shall have done a grave disservice to all our constituents.

7.41 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): We all know that the Bill is about the Lambeth loophole, but I welcome any debate on capping, which we in Calderdale lived through last year, despite setting the fourth lowest poll tax in the country. Nobody could have called £297 excessive. Unless we make cuts of £9 million, we shall be in the same position this year. */Interruption./* I am sure that the Minister will get plenty of time to reply to the debate. I hope that he will listen to one or two of the points that I make.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities said that he could not understand why councils did not want to reduce the full cap for hard-pressed poll taxpayers. I thought that that was quite a cynical and unnecessary remark. He knows perfectly well that no council wants to set the poll tax higher than it needs. It is daft to suggest that councillors want to do that. He does not seem to accept the reason for the existence of councils. Their purpose is to provide services. For example, if they cannot provide home care services for an elderly person who has no other means of income apart from the state pension and income support, they believe that they have failed that old person, who cannot rely on the private sector to provide what might be a life-saving service.

Last week, I went to see the Secretary of State about Calderdale's budget for next year and to try to avoid capping. We argued that, once again, we had been granted an unfair allocation under the standard spending assessment. Calderdale's SSA has been increased by 17·7 per cent., which compares unfavourably with the average for metropolitan districts in West Yorkshire of 19·2 per cent. It compares unfavourably with the average for all metropolitan districts of 19·1 per cent. and with the average increase for shire districts of 28·2 per cent.

We asked the Minister why Calderdale is receiving less favourable treatment and, more specifically, why the reasonable and long-expanded argument that Calderdale's normal highway maintenance costs are high has been continuously ignored, despite Minister after Minister accepting our case on the highways budget. We were listened to in polite silence but were not given any hope.

I do not want this issue to be confused with the winter maintenance costs. Normal maintenance costs should take into account the high altitude of much of Calderdale's area and the associated gradients, which result in weather causing more rapid deterioration of the road surface. That is never taken into account when assessing the normal maintenance costs for Calderdale. We convinced previous Ministers that we receive an unfair allocation, but we were listened to in complete silence.

The total budget for all councils in 1990-91 has been increased by only 7 per cent., which is almost 4 per cent. less than inflation. There is no getting away from that fact, and I should be interested to hear the Minister's comments on that. For Calderdale to avoid the poll tax cap yet again, it must set a budget within 5 per cent. of its SSA target. That effectively means, given inflation and assuming that what little remains of its reserves are not used, that the Government are prescribing a cut in expenditure on

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

Calderdale's services of approximately £9 million. The Minister gave us no hope, but that is the reality for next year if there is no improvement or relaxation in the rule.

I shudder to think what will happen if West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority suffers the effects of poll tax capping. The fire authority provides an excellent fire and emergency rescue service to more than 2 million people across five districts in west Yorkshire—Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield and Calderdale. The county's 31 fire stations are staffed by 1,980 whole-time firefighters and 239 retained firefighters.

Thirty-six of the stations are staffed 24 hours a day, including the one at Sowerby Bridge in my constituency. I mentioned that station to the Minister when I joined a delegation protesting about the threatened cut in the fire authority. The threatened closure of Sowerby Bridge is causing local people much concern. The authority's technical services committee is considering the closure, but I must tell the Minister that there is deep concern in the community and in the surrounding area, because that fire station provides not only a good service to Sowerby Bridge but an excellent service to surrounding villages, industry and remote communities in Calder valley. If we lose that fire station, lives will be placed at risk and property will be unnecessarily damaged.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key) *rose*—

Mrs. Mahon: I know what the Minister is going to say but perhaps he will allow me to finish my point.

West Yorkshire fire service provides a brilliant service. To give some idea of its value to people in the area, in 1989-90 there were 582 injuries, 124 people received burns, 104 people were rescued and there were 45 deaths. If the programme of cuts goes through, those statistics, bad as they are, will treble.

Mr. Key: The hon. Lady will recall that when she came to see me last week I congratulated her fire authority on carrying out its fire cover review, unlike one of her neighbouring authorities. The trouble is that it will not consider what to do about it until next March, some five years after it initiated the review.

Mrs. Mahon: I am sure that the Minister will not mind if I deal with lives and the facts about the service, which we believe is so vital in West Yorkshire. This year and next year, the fire authority is facing a deep financial crisis, which will put at risk the excellent service that it provides. To set next year's budget according to the Department of the Environment's SSA—£44·6 million—would mean sacking 500 firefighters and closing five fire stations. The Minister knows that: he has the facts. If the authority sets its budget at SSA plus 12·5 per cent.—£49·5 million—which is the maximum allowed if it is to escape poll tax capping, it will still be £3·5 million short of the £53 million needed to protect services and just to stand still.

The Minister listened to us with courtesy. Having been on many such visits, I can say that it was one of the better experiences I have had. Being an optimist, and believing the Minister to be a reasonable man, I cannot imagine that he can now contemplate capping that service. We hope for some form of de minimis provision. We explained in some detail what we meant by that and I shall not cover the ground again now.

As I said, I made a special plea for Sowerby Bridge in my constituency. The closure of the fire station there would lead to loss of life and great damage to property—quite unnecessarily so. With the recession and the loss of so much, Sowerby Bridge is suffering enough as it is. That small town needs everything that it can get and, in my opinion, the loss of the fire station would take the heart out of it.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Lady confirm that one of the losses to her constituency recently has been that of a Labour councillor, whose seat the Conservatives won on a 14 per cent. swing?

Mrs. Mahon: I can also confirm to the hon. Gentleman that we have just gained a seat from the Conservatives with a 15 per cent. swing, so it is one-all. I should also point out that the results had more to do with local than with national issues and that we will get the seat back in May with no problem.

The police authority may also suffer from capping. Today I received a letter from the chairman of West Yorkshire police authority, who is writing to all West Yorkshire Members to seek our support in asking the Government to reconsider proposals which it says will severely jeopardise the financing of the police service in the county in 1991-92. The chairman writes:

"The Director of Finance reported that the Authority would have to reduce its budget by £8m (gross) in order to avoid the Dept of Environment's present 'capping' proposals. This reduction is equivalent to a 4 per cent. cutback. As you may well be aware, over 80 per cent. of the Authority's expenditure is on pay and related expenditure. Therefore, any cutback of this magnitude will affect the number of Police Officers and civilians that can be appointed. Initial indications are that, even if Police and civilian recruitment is stopped completely, it will only go half way to meeting the necessary reduction. This could mean that by March 1992 there will be 350 less Police Officers on the streets of West Yorkshire and about 200 less civilians supporting them. This would have to be coupled with no new vehicles, and a complete stop on all repairs to buildings."

I shudder to think what will happen in West Yorkshire if those cuts go ahead. We have suffered increases in crime generally and in the number of burglaries. People are desperate to see more police men on the streets and to have their communities better policed. We shall not get that if the local police authority budget is cut.

Mr. Key: It is a pleasure to be getting on with the hon. Lady so well. No one can say that I do not listen to authorities around the country. When I saw the hon. Lady's local police authority last week, I pointed out a difficulty to it. Although it said that it wanted more civilianisation—that is entirely in line with what the Home Office wants—in the next breath it said that, in the establishment indicators used to determine the SSA, no account is taken of the level of civilianisation. I fear that the reply to that is that the local authority associations, which are controlled by the Labour party, cannot agree on whether those indicators should include civilianisation. So far, they have said that they think that they should not. They cannot have it both ways.

Mrs. Mahon: I seem to have touched a raw nerve—first on the subject of the fire authority and now on the subject of the police authority. The letter clearly states—the

Minister is being warned—that there could be 350 fewer police officers on the beat if capping goes ahead. I view that with very serious concern, and I hope that the Minister will, too.

As I said, last year Calderdale was poll tax-capped—very unfairly, in my opinion. Tories on Calderdale council now claim that cuts in services are the responsibility of the Labour group, which has only had total control for just over 12 months. That is absolute rubbish. It is a deliberate attempt to deceive the electorate and I believe that the Tories will get their come-uppance in May.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) touched on the services that councils are expected to provide. The Government have placed added burdens on councils but have not given them sufficient money to cope. The Government have been taking money away from councils since 1979. If Calderdale council now received the same rate support grant as it enjoyed in 1979, we would be £42 million better off.

We have had nothing but cuts, cuts, cuts. Responsibility for the provision of services has been piled on to councils under the Government's legislation, including the care in the community provisions, the Children Act 1989, the local management of schools provisions, the reduction in housing benefit subsidy, the Food Safety Act 1990 and the proposed increases in respect of probation reports. Added together, the costs of those provisions to Calderdale alone this year are £2 million.

As I said earlier, to satisfy provisional capping rules, Calderdale needs to reduce its standstill budget by approximately £9 million. Even if we used all our balances, the effects on services would be devastating. The council has struggled bravely to ensure that capping has not hurt the most vulnerable in the community and to try to make cuts where they will do the least damage. Given that fact, this treatment by central Government of local government is disgraceful.

The Bill is not necessary. The Minister knows that the new Secretary of State is going to abolish poll tax. There is no other way of proceeding. The poll tax is a gaping black hole. One can pour money into it and throw money at it but one will never make it fair and one will never achieve adequate collection levels. It is a disgraceful policy. It has brought down one Prime Minister and I predict that, if the Government do not get rid of it, it will bring down another.

7.56 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I support the Government on the Bills before us. I am particularly pleased to see the righting of the anomaly on caravans, and the sorting out of Lambeth will be especially useful.

As has already been said, my local authority—Derbyshire county council—is a collection of unreformed spendthrifts, known locally as "the idiots in Matlock". As I am sure the House will be aware, old-fashioned, stupid, arrogant socialism is alive and well in this country, and residing—indeed, rampant—up in Derbyshire, and it is a very great pity.

A number of examples have been given of what that authority has done. I merely offer a new one: the adult literacy team funded by Derbyshire county council decided to hold a day conference on—would you believe it, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Nicaragua. It was free, and it was paid for by the county. The team is entitled to hold a day conference on Nicaragua, but I suggest that those who attend should pay for it themselves and that the council should not use our rate fund money in that way.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Currie: I should be delighted.

Mrs. Mahon: I imagine that the reason why the team decided to hold an adult literacy conference on Nicaragua is that the experience of that country, and its adult literacy campaign following the revolution in 1979, has been praised by every literacy organisation in the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Nicaragua is a long way from the contents of the Bill.

Mrs. Currie: Absolutely, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They held the conference because they are a bunch of left-wing idiots. That was the only reason.

Derbyshire county council is the largest authority to have been capped recently and the first ever county authority to have been capped. Its budget was cut from £560 million to £520 million and fortunately that resulted fairly quickly in a sharp reduction in the charge—down by £56 from £458 in Derby, which had the 10th highest charge in the country. That produced a sigh of relief in my constituency.

The county budget was reduced by rather more than that. It was reduced not by the £40 million that the capping legislation required but by £45 million. That rather suggests that all the noise made in Derbyshire, both before and since capping, about the effects that it would have was all a load of hogwash. If the authority could cut the budget by even more than was required, why did it not go for that budget level in the first place? There was no guarantee under the previous legislation that the link between the budget and the charge would be made and that is why today's legislation is particularly useful. The uncertainty and fear that was generated when we first realised that the charge might stay the same, was unacceptable.

I am also pleased that the uncertainty has been reduced for 1991-92. We now know that next year's budget must be less than 7 per cent. higher than this year's budget or the county will again be capped. Therefore, we know that the maximum will be about £555 million.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The hon. Lady just said that we now know the arrangements for the 1991-92 budget. Is that a firm commitment that there will be no review of the poll tax or any change to it before the end of March 1992? Does the hon. Lady not anticipate any change to the basic legislation to which the Bill is attached?

Mrs. Currie: I was merely making the point that the county authority has a habit of spending as much as it can possibly get away with. This year, it got it wrong and it spent too much. The county was capped and there were major court cases, but the Government won. The maximum amount that Derbyshire county council will be able to spend next year, without being capped, is 6·9 per cent. extra. That brings at least some certainty into our lives. I share the view of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and I hope that Derbyshire county council spends rather less next year. That is possible and it would be beneficial to the charge payers who have to foot the bill.

The community charge system was recently reviewed, and the Bill is part of the response. I backed the whole

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set-up, the basic principle that everyone uses local services and everyone should pay for them and those who cannot pay should have a rebate system. That is sensible.

However, the trouble is that in my county and my constituency, many people believe that there are difficulties and those difficulties show up sharply in the case of Lambeth. If there is to be a personal cost, that is not a charge; it is a tax. A charge is something someone pays for a service that he wants, such as meals on wheels. A tax is something that someone pays because he has no choice. If there is to be a tax, people expect it to be progressive and not regressive. The rebate system is no alternative to that.

The process has also turned out to be opaque, and rate capping in Derbyshire, and I am sure in Lambeth, has had some rather anomalous effects. Charge capping has led to a loss of rebate, which in turn has meant that in the autumn of 1990, some of my constituents are required to pay to the local authority more then they did at the beginning of 1990 when the charge was higher and they received a rebate. There is no way in which we can say that that is fair. If my colleagues on the Government Front Bench are looking for anomalies to correct, I suggest that they put that one right as well.

I was a councillor in the great city of Birmingham for 11 years. Local government was established in Birmingham more than a century ago when the great Joseph Chamberlain walked the streets there. We should cherish the vital role in the provision of services and the maintenance of standards that local government can provide. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State for the Environment shares that view. It is significant that the new Prime Minister was a Lambeth councillor and virtually the first Bill to come before this new Administration is intended to sort Lambeth out—and about time too.

Some principles emerge from the relatively minor changes to anomalies that we are debating under the Bill. We cannot simply return to the rating system. We cannot simply scrap the set-up and return to the rates. A number of points that have been incorporated in legislation are now widely accepted. Most people believe that local government should continue to be supported by locally raised funds, that the local authority should have a tax-raising power and take responsibility. That is the point of standing as a councillor. We must ensure that the local authority has an incentive to improve its area. The trouble with the uniform business rate as it stands is that there is no incentive. A county can simply neglect its land, because that will make no difference to how much money comes in.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The hon. Lady said that those principles emerge from the Bill that we are debating today. How can that be? The Bill ploughs on with the poll tax as it was. It might be redundant by Wednesday and it might be withdrawn. We might have something else to discuss, and that might be the position that the hon. Lady supported during the election for the Conservative party leadership.

Mrs. Currie: If the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who is my colleague from Derbyshire, would just sit still and pin his ears back, I shall give him a little lesson on the link between the Bill and the principles that I am trying to enunciate. It would make a change for the hon. Gentleman to sit and listen—he might learn something.

It should be possible for a local authority such as Lambeth or Derbyshire to be encouraged to develop its land. Under the old rates system that was at least a possibility and a council was encouraged to get rid of derelict land and to develop it for housing or industry because that would widen the rate base. As a result, in Birmingham in 1982 we widened the rate base by selling off surplus properties and land and we reduced the charge to our ratepayers the following year by 12·5 per cent. even though our budgets were increased. That is the golden scenario that we should build into legislation.

Another principle lies at the heart of the Bill. The tax, charge or whatever we call it should bear some relationship to a local authority's overall spending. If Lambeth chooses to spend a king's ransom or if Derbyshire chooses to spend like there is no tomorrow, that must be reflected somehow in the charge paid by the people who live in the neighbourhood.

Of course there must be an equalisation process. Many local authorities do not have the population or, under the rating system, do not have the rate base to generate enough money for their needs. Wealthy authorities do not need so much and poor authorities—we have heard several examples—have considerable needs. As a principle, the legislation states that the tax should bear some relationship to the authority's overall spending and that means that accountability works through the ballot box sooner or later.

There is also an argument, which I broadly accept, that the tax should have some relationship to relative wealth. That is when we argue about how we measure wealth and whether that is related to the amount of capital someone possesses, to the capital value of a property, and whether it should be related to a roof tax, a floor tax or any of the dozen different alternatives put forward by the Labour party over the past two years.

If the system was based on the capital values of properties and not on the present system, Lambeth's income would be decreased. Property values in Lambeth are perhaps 20 per cent. lower than they were two years ago. If the council's income had been linked to capital values, the amount of income that it would have had to play with would have decreased. That is the opposite of what we want. During a recession or a time of falling capital values, as I am sure the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) would agree as we were both councillors in big cities at the same time, or when things are not going well in the economy, that is precisely the time when local authority services are under most pressure and there is often most need. That is not the time when there should be a drop in a local authority's income.

The Bill is part of a rather crude mechanism for using some national Government power to control what local authorities are getting up to. We have ended up with a dozen different systems, none of which seems to be working terribly well. My plea today is that, along with Lambeth and Derbyshire, perhaps current thinking should consider ways in which local government and central Goverment interact.

At the moment, we have the control system of the ballot box, which is great and I agree with it. However, we cannot get our council out in Derbyshire until 1993. We elected it

in 1989 under the old rates system. We brought the new system in, in 1990, and we are stuck with the council until 1993. That is not very satisfactory.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): When the hon. Lady reads her speech tomorrow, she will note that everything that she has said has been a complete denial of the principles of the community charge. She is talking about ability to pay, accountability, and a local authority being able to raise its own revenue. They are exactly the arguments that were put by Opposition Members during the passage of the legislation.

It is incredible that the hon. Lady is now putting forward those arguments. How can she say that the ballot box will bring about accountability when she agrees with charge capping? The two cannot go hand in hand. The Government either allow accountability to take its course and the ballot box to provide a local authority that the electorate want, or they charge-cap. They cannot have both.

Mrs. Currie: We have both, and it is a jolly good thing that we in Derbyshire have both. Most of the time most local authorities are prudent and sensible. Most local authorities in this country have tried to behave with a degree of prudence. A small number do not, and do not quite deliberately.

I do not regard Derbyshire county council as composed of fools; I regard it as composed of knaves. They know what they are doing and they do it with great panache and glee. The result is that many of my constituents have to pay far more than they would otherwise have to pay.

We have the ballot box system and we have capping, which is a blunt instrument but it is effective and I hope that any future system continues to have it just as we had it before we had the community charge. We have inspectorates—they are coming out of our ears—for schools, local authorities, social services, old people's homes and so on. My worry is that many of the inspectorates that maintain standards, particularly in respect of child care services, often report too late and when there has been a terrible disaster or tragedy. Somehow we need to make that part of their work better.

We also have the district auditor who is an essential part of the entire system. The district auditor in Derbyshire is currently working on several reports about ultra vires expenditure and inappropriate claims by various Labour county councillors. Several reports are floating around and nobody has seen them yet. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will find out what has happened to those various reports by the Derbyshire district auditor and ensure that they are published and that appropriate action, which might include the disqualification of the councillors concerned, is taken as quickly as possible.

We also have other systems, but the whole set-up of control at the moment is complicated and muddled. Sometimes as a result, it is ineffective. If it worked, we would not have a Derbyshire budget of more than £0·5 billion a year. We have very little deprivation—we must be straightforward about it—in Derbyshire. We have relatively low unemployment rates, and they are still falling. We have massive inward investment from all over the world into highly successful businesses. We simply have very few problems in our bright and beautiful county, and we do not need to spend half a billion quid a year providing services, administration and conferences that are not needed.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Why is there so much concern in Derbyshire about the results of poll tax capping in connection with the disabled? The Derbyshire Coalition for Disabled People has had its budget cut considerably, as has the Ripley Centre for Integrated Living. There was a great shout and concern about that. I blame the Government's rate-capping policy for it, while others blame the county council. It is a matter of great concern, which shows that there are disablement problems in the county that need to be dealt with and many other social problems, especially in working-class rather than middle-class areas of Derbyshire.

Mrs. Currie: I represent one of the best working-class areas in Derbyshire and I am very proud of the local people who sent me here. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well why the disabled have lost their grants. It was because his crass, horrible and cruel friends in Derbyshire cut their grants. That was the first thing they did. The county authority has taken on 8,000 additional staff since 1981 and is still charging local families exactly the same price for school meals as it charged in 1981. We now have 10 years—*[Interruption.]* Admittedly we would all regard it as a great success if the Government managed to charge the same prices as they did 10 years ago, but we have not yet reached that stage.

That is why the hon. Gentleman and his friends are wrong. They tried to cut the grant to Age Concern and there was such an outcry that it had to be restored. They are measured by their own actions. If the first thing they did was to cut their publicity department and reduce the number of education advisers, which had been severely criticised by the inspectors, I would say, "Good, they are doing the right thing." When the first thing they did was to cut the budget for disabled people, by their deeds shall ye know them.

Mr. Nellist: Is not it a fact that directors who are earning £70,000 a year are paying far less tax than they were 10 or 11 years ago, to the tune of more than £1,000 a week? Is not the only difference that Labour authorities, which freeze the cost of school meals or bus fares, are looking after our folk, and that the hon. Lady's Government, with tax cuts for the rich, are looking after her folk? The principle is exactly the same, only we do it for far more people.

Mrs. Currie: Some of the most highly paid people who live in Derbyshire are senior employees of the county authority. They include people such as the current director of education who, two years ago, was a councillor of the same authority. If that is not jobs for the boys and people who are benefiting from income tax cuts, I do not know what is. The previous chief executive, who was appointed a couple of years ago, was a former Member of this House.

Mr. Haynes: Say it outside.

Mrs. Currie: I shall say it in the House, and the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) will listen. He does not like it, does he? The previous chief executive was a former Member of this House. He lasted just nine months. He was one of the highest-paid people. He paid a lot of tax on his salary, and no doubt he has paid a lot of tax on what they

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have paid him off with. My constituents will be much happier with fewer senior officers in Derbyshire and with fewer people spending their money as though there were no tomorrow.

Mr. Nellist: That is probably one thing on which the hon. Lady and I would agree. I do not like Labour authorities employing people on five or 10 times the wages that local people get. There is an old saying in what is known as the good book about taking a beam out of one's own eye before taking a mote out of anybody else's. The hon. Lady is talking about somebody who was once an elected Member moving on to a paid job. We have 250 Tory Members with two, three, four or five jobs. A previous hon. Member for Hexham, Geoffrey Rippon, as he then was, was a Member of Parliament, a QC and either the chairman or director of 55 companies. I have never been able to work out how he ever found time to come in and pick up his parliamentary pocket money.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman forgets that many of my colleagues are able to take on this sort of job because people want them and their talents. The question that I put to the hon. Gentleman about Labour jobs for the boys in country authorities such as mine is quite simple. Would individuals like that get the job at all if they were not the political playmates of the councillors who appoint them? That is the trouble.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps now we may get back to the Bill.

Mrs. Currie: I am most grateful for your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you realise, there are issues in Derbyshire that are yet to be resolved. Among them are what the budget is and should be and what level of services should be required. I am therefore glad to support these modest changes in the law, but I hope that we shall see a much more thorough reform in the near future.

8.18 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The performance by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) must be one of the best examples of a schizophrenic speech that hon. Members have heard for a long time. I gather that the main thrust of her argument was that she trusted local democracy, but not in Derbyshire, and that the local electorate is not capable of exercising its judgment in Derbyshire, but that electors in the rest of the country are capable of doing that.

My experience of what goes on in Derbyshire is based on living in the Greater Manchester area and visiting people in Buxton, Glossop and the area on the edge of the Peak district. I have seen those areas. There is considerable deprivation. I noticed that the majority of people there are delighted with the progress that Derbyshire county council has made in the provision of services since 1981 when the Labour party took back control of the county council.

The 1981, 1985 and 1989 results suggest that people are pleased with the services that are provided in Derbyshire. The next time the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South is persuaded by the Whips to make a speech, I suggest that she thinks a little more carefully before she starts. I realise that she wants to ingratiate herself and to get back in favour, but I suspect that the fact that the Whips will have put down a mark because she spoke for 20 minutes will not do her as much damage as if those from whom she is seeking promotion actually read what she has said.

As far as I am concerned, this whole debate has been a waste of time. On some occasions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I have seen the House waste a lot of time, and this is a very good example of that. I do not believe that any hon. Member wants the Bill to be enacted. Opposition Members want a Bill that will abolish the community charge because of principle and because we believe that the poll tax has been a disaster for the country. Conservative Members want its abolition because of expediency. They know that, unless they get rid of the poll tax, they will go——

Mr. Illsley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the speech of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was a plea for the abolition of the poll tax because it called for accountability and for local government to raise its own revenue?

Mr. Bennett: I accept my hon. Friend's argument.

We must consider the Bill against the background that we want to get rid of the poll tax. The Bill means that, for another 12 months, my constituents and those of other hon. Members will have to suffer as a result of the poll tax. The Bill is also a total contradiction. It is all about capping, which means taking away any measure of local accountability and the choice of local electors to decide the level of their community charge.

As I understood it, the whole philosophy behind the community charge was, first, that it would simplify local government; and, secondly, that local government is currently spending too much money and that by creating some local hardship local authorities would be encouraged to reduce their charges. The downside, according to the Government, was that more people would pay, and that there would be some problems with collection.

However, all that we have had as a result of the poll tax have been disadvantages. The Government cannot claim that there have been any advantages from it. Let us consider whether the poll tax is more simple than the previous system of local government finance. I cannot find anything about the poll tax to suggest that it is. It is no easier for my constituents to understand whether they are getting a good or a bad deal from local government under the poll tax than under any of the previous systems.

If anyone can explain how any of my constituents can look at the standard spending assessment and see whether their local authority has been treated fairly, I should be interested to hear from him. It beats me. Even the experts cannot see anything fair about it. It is simply a matter of expediency. We all hope that the money is worked out correctly, but on the whole we know that Conservative-controlled authorities have done well out of the SSAs and that Labour-controlled, Alliance and hung councils have done badly. That is the only consistency that I can see.

I turn to the proposition that if hardship is created local authorities will spend less. All the evidence from my constituency and from many other parts of the country shows that local authorities are underspending. They are not meeting the clear needs of the people in their local communities. We should be looking for ways to increase local authorities' ability to meet the needs of local people.

Now let me deal with the disadvantages. Some people are not paying because of principle, but many are not

paying because they cannot afford to do so. I believe that we are creating a new culture among our young people of how to avoid paying the poll tax. I have spoken to a number of young people who do not want not to pay on principle but who are not keen to pay because of financial difficulties. They are reluctant to register anywhere for the poll tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has highlighted evidence of a decline in the number on the electoral roll. I want the Government to take this Bill away and to replace it with a Bill to scrap the poll tax.

I should like to outline briefly the impact that the poll tax has had on my constituency. I am in the delicate position of representing two local authorities, Tameside and Stockport. Although in many ways the two authorities are similar, there are also considerable contrasts between them. However, both feel under considerable pressure because they might be capped. Tameside has been a Labour-controlled authority since 1983. On the whole, it is an efficient local authority which has striven hard in the past few years to improve its efficiency. However, instead of considering how to provide better services, for most of the last year or two it has tried to see how it can get round the standard spending assessment because it is unfair to Tameside, and how it can make cuts that will cause the least possible damage. Tameside has not had the resources that could have enabled it to achieve greater efficiency.

Our major problem in the Denton part of my constituency is traffic congestion. Many people now have motor cars, but many streets were not designed for them or for parking. We therefore have parking problems and an increasing problem with rat running. The local authority needs the time and resources to establish proper traffic management schemes. Such schemes would be expensive, but could well save lives. Many youngsters in my constituency are now at risk because of the volume of traffic.

Tameside has an increasing number of elderly people. Time after time constituents ask for a simple adaptation, such as a handrail, or help in getting up the stairs—not necessarily a stair lift, often only an extra rail. However, the local authority is having to say to people, "We are sorry, but we cannot provide that," or "We cannot provide it for some time." That is a major problem because it reduces the quality of life for those elderly people now and makes it more likely that they will need expensive care in the future——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All this is a long way from the content of the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: I understand that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the whole thrust of the Bill is to frighten authorities such as Tameside into cutting their expenditure as a result of the capping mechanism. That is why I am arguing that authorities such as Tameside should be encouraged to increase their expenditure in social services areas rather than being pressurised and worried about how much they should spend, with the result that elderly people do not get the help and adaptations that they need.

Tameside also faces child abuse problems. There have been tremendous scare stories in the newspapers about spending money on that problem. On the one hand, the authority is told not to put children at risk, and on the other it is told, "Don't spend money, because you may be capped and, if you are capped, you are likely to be under greater pressure."

The same applies to the problem of young people with learning difficulties. Several young people with learning difficulties have been cared for by their parents in their homes, but now need a community home to be provided by the local authority. Again, there is pressure and the local authority is reluctant to find the money simply because of the capping pressures.

I could go on to refer to education, but Tameside is also under pressure because of new Government legislation. The Environmental Protection Act 1990, of which I greatly approve, requires Tameside to pick up more litter, especially in areas such as the centre of Denton. All that costs money, and the council is caught between the pressure of being capped, the demand to provide services for local people, and the costs of those services. I have every sympathy for the hard-worked councillors of Tameside who are trying to find their way between the conflicting pressures—the capping pressures coming from the Government, the hardship that they know is being created for people because of having to pay the poll tax, and the obvious need for services.

Exactly the same picture applies to Stockport, but Stockport is not Labour-controlled. From 1974 it was controlled by the Conservatives, but they lost control in the 1980s and it is now a hung council. Stockport has traditionally been a low spender. It is one of the worst spenders on education in the country, and is not at all profligate. However, it is under pressure from the Government and is absolutely scared stiff that it will be capped this year. The authority needs extra money for social services, provision in the community and facilities for people with learning difficulties, but is having to see where it can make cuts, which will result in hardship.

During the past few years money should have been spent on old people's homes in Stockport so that their residents could have been given single rooms rather than communal sleeping areas, but there has been no money. The same problems apply to education and refuse collection. When I was elected in 1974, a substantial number of people employed in the parks department in Stockport had learning difficulties. The authorities regarded it as a service to employ those people to do something worth while.

Gradually, with all the pressures on local authorities to become efficient, those people were squeezed out of employment through such means as productivity schemes. Some of them still live in Stockport but have been unemployed for long periods and are unlikely to get a job. The Government pay almost the same amount in benefit as those people used to earn, but when they worked they felt that they were making a contribution to the community. Now, with all the pressure for local authority efficiency, they have lost their jobs, and they feel disillusioned and unwanted by society, and the parks are no better looked after.

The Strangeways riots this spring had nothing to do with local government in Greater Manchester, but now the police authority is faced with a large bill for the overtime that had to be worked by policemen looking after prisoners in police cells. Local authorities had no control over that, but unless the Government come up with extra

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money to meet those extra costs, they will affect the precept that the police authority has to impose on all the local authorities in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It is wrong that a local authority should have to pick up a bill created by a Government seeking to maintain overcrowded, disgusting prisons. Has the standard spending assessment formula taken into consideration such ad hoc expenditure? When the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, will he say whether he intends to reimburse the local authority for that extra expenditure this financial year or next financial year?

Mr. Bennett: As I understand it, Manchester police authority has not been given any sign that the money will be reimbursed. The local authorities are trying to arrive at a poll tax for next year under the threat that that money will not be given back and are having to consider making further cuts.

I am worried that the continual pressure on local authorities such as Tameside and Stockport will make them consider further cuts. The local authority in Stockport has been under such pressure that it considered stopping the rising-fives going to school. That would make a small saving, but would handicap all those youngsters for the rest of their lives because we all know the advantage of starting full-time education as early as possible. That proposal seemed absolutely crazy and I think that Stockport has had the sense to dismiss it. That example shows the pressures that local authorities are under to avoid the capping process.

The Government should take away the Bill, forget about it and come back with a simple measure to abolish the poll tax, or community charge, and go back to the old rates. There is no need for a review. There is nothing complicated about it: most local authorities could return to the rating system next April. I am sure that all local authorities would be pleased to do that; my constituents would certainly be delighted by it.

8.35 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), because he correctly said that his own speech was a waste of time, so I know that he will be charitable with mine.

Capping is a necessity because of excess expenditure, not inadequacy of income. Capping is a reflection on the need to control the outgoings, not an attempt to ration the amount of money that comes in. Therefore, capping is necessary, regardless of whether we have a system of poll tax, rates or, as I hope, in future, a more acceptable system. There will still be a need to control, not those who wish to spend merely over the odds—clearly there is flexibility within any system for one borough to increase its revenue—but those who seek to spend excessively and without any restraint of public consideration.

I shall relate a tale of two boroughs, one of which lies at the heart of the Bill—the borough of Lambeth—and my own borough, the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, which marches alongside the borough of Lambeth, separated only by the River Thames. Those two boroughs have many factors in common in relation to their expenditure needs. They both have the problems and advantages of being in the cosmopolitan heart of our great capital city. We share many of the huge costs that go with living in the heart of an inner city. There are large numbers of disadvantaged and poor people, many ethnic minorities and, in my constituency and Lambeth, a large West Indian community which, in Notting Hill and beyond, because it has been there so long, is now, I am grateful to say, an entirely English community. My constituency contains the biggest Moroccan community in this country. We are faced with high expenditure for new groups of people in the country and for the disadvantaged.

The two boroughs, which march side by side, share another problem—a tremendously high turnover of people every year, which makes the poll tax so hard to collect. The London electricity board, which has to change the meter every time someone moves flat or house, changes 25 per cent. of the meters in my borough every year. This movement of people adds to our expenditure.

Another similarity between the two boroughs which may interest the House is that we compete over which of us houses the largest number of Members of Parliament. My old friend the late Ian Gow used to leave the House to go off to the people's republic of Lambeth every night. An equally venerable, but somewhat more prosperous, Member of Parliament lives in the heart of my constituency in one of the houses that would have been charged the highest property tax, but for which he now pays a relatively small community charge—or rather, refuses to pay: the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). He lives in one of those grand houses where, when Members of Parliament call, they are requested to go round to the tradesmen's entrance.

I remember calling at a house only a few yards down from the home of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, where I was met by the butler. When I asked how the house would be voting, the butler pulled himself up to his full height and said, "Madam is somewhat disillusioned with the Conservatives, but you have got my vote, Guv." That shows the mixture of people we have in the heart of London.

Another similarity between north Kensington and Lambeth is that both constituencies have a large Labour population, both of which respond to the efficiency of expenditure of their respective boroughs. There is a difference which explains why one borough is being capped and why the other, with similar problems, is a model of efficiency. It is that the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea has the lowest number of employees per 1,000 constituents, while Lambeth employs one of the largest and hence most expensive work forces.

The salaries of those employees have to be met by the people living in the borough, which is why Lambeth is faced with such high expenditure and thus with poll tax capping. My borough has one of the best records of maintaining council house stock and one of the largest housing association stocks——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure that extolling the virtues of Kensington and Chelsea has a great deal to do with the purposes of this Bill.

Mr. Fishburn: I realise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was straying—you were kind to let me stray so far.

The point is that expenditure lies at the heart of capping. If councils spend the money they raise through

revenue efficiently, there is no need for them to be capped. They can use their money to improve services and work for decent living conditions in their neck of the woods. Councils can achieve far more if they control public expenditure rigorously than if they let it rip. Letting it rip invites capping.

My borough and I have been against the poll tax since its inception. The legislation putting in place the community charge was given its Second Reading before I became an MP.

Expenditure must be watched carefully throughout the life of an annual budget. Capping an authority is not the rational answer to a rational local authority; it is, however, the rational answer to an irrational expenditure plan. Capping is therefore needed for those boroughs—they are overwhelmingly run by the Labour party—which do not control their expenditure rationally. I am delighted to say that it will not be required in my borough.

8.42 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Quite a few Labour Members still want to speak, so I shall try to be brief.

This Bill, like the rest of the poll tax legislation and the rest of Government legislation since 1979, stinks. It does not show an ounce of compassion, or of tolerance for or understanding of the needs of local people. Doncaster was capped last year, and under this Bill it may be capped again in future. I am extremely pleased to say that we have a caring, compassionate council in Doncaster. It is concerned about the quality of life that the people of Doncaster have come to expect from a highly efficient Labour-controlled council.

The council has already endeavoured to give value for money—that is its motto. Doncaster has services of which we can be justifiably proud. But that is not good enough; we want to improve those services, because it is impossible to stand still.

The people of Doncaster have come to expect much more than the reduced quality of life that the Government offer with this Bill. The Minister said that Doncaster would receive a 9 per cent. increase in its SSA calculation. We need to know what that figure refers to: the figure that was capped or the figure that the Minister decided Doncaster should spend? If it is 9 per cent. on the Minister's decision, Doncaster's spending power will be severely limited next year.

The Minister said that the High Court and the Lords had backed the Government's right to poll tax-cap local authorities. The Government may well have won the legal argument, but they have certainly not won the moral argument—they would have been left out of court if the moral argument counted.

When the poll tax was introduced, the Government made great play with how it would make local authorities accountable to the people who paid it. I regret to say that that has not happened. The public have seen through the charade and are making the Government accountable for the poll tax. That is one of the reasons why the Conservatives' beloved leader was stabbed in the back and given the boot. The policy helped to bring about the downfall of the Prime Minister. Many Tory Members have supported the poll tax throughout, despite the many terrible ways in which it attempts to destroy the quality of life that we have come to expect in Doncaster.

Doncaster is an authority that has suffered a great deal of unemployment because of the rundown of heavy industry, which gave work to thousands of men and women for many years. Government policy caused that rundown, so Doncaster needs to spend money to find alternative jobs, to attract business and to clear up the results of generations of neglect of the environment while heavy industry provided jobs in my area and south Yorkshire.

Every time Ministers visit Doncaster metropolitan borough council, they come away pleased with the highly efficient way in which local councillors operate—full of praise for their achievements in the face of difficult tasks. The point is that "you get nowt for nowt". To bring about the sort of improvements that we seek for the people whom we represent, we need to spend a few bob—but the Government do not want the local authority to spend a few bob.

I am a great believer in education. We must ensure that our youngsters have an education to take them into the 21st century. Education is the single largest expense for local government—Doncaster spends about 67 per cent. of its budget on it—so education is the first to suffer. We have a great many nursery places because our people wanted them, but it would appear that the Government are not interested in that. They are tinkering with the poll tax, when the Secretary of State for the Environment should come to the House and withdraw this Bill—and the rest of the poll tax legislation with it. He will not come, and that is a great tragedy.

I suppose that we should be pleased, because, as long as the poll tax hangs round the Government's neck, more and more Labour Members will be elected to this Chamber. I do not want it that way, because, while the poll tax is in operation, it will bring pain, suffering and misery to many of my constituents.

The Government talk about winners and losers. There are not many gainers, but the vast majority of them in Doncaster do not want the damned poll tax anyway, because they recognise the injustice of the system. The people in the ivory tower of Whitehall do not appear to be able to see the pain and suffering that is endured by ordinary people. That is a great tragedy.

The Minister is relatively new in his Department. He should seriously consider saying to his boss, "There is only one cure and only one commitment that will satisfy the House and the people. We must get shot of the poll tax. Let us have a sensible system that the vast majority of our people want."

8.50 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) used words with which we are all familiar when he suggested that Labour would win the next election. He spoke with less gusto than usual, and although Opposition Members always mention the opinion polls, he did not. Could it be because he is one of many Labour Members who are plotting in corners against their leader trying to destablise him? He should desist from that because we are happy with the leader of the Labour party. His hon. Friends should leave him alone and let him get on with the job.

Mr. Redmond: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening. The leader of the Labour party is firmly committed to abolishing the poll tax. Unlike Conservative

[Mr. Redmond]

Members we do not need to stab our leader in order to get our party elected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will lead us to victory at the next election. Many Conservative Members will not be there to see that happen.

Mr. Hughes: Such a warm endorsement should worry the Labour leader.

There are firm arguments for and against community charge capping. People with authoritative knowledge reasonable argue that capping councils is undemocratic. They say that we now have a system by which people can see how much a council spends on their behalf. Many Conservative Members accept that principle but it has one fault. It is that, in the first few years of the community charge, Labour local authorities can blame huge spending increases on the Government. In spite of those spending increases and the fact that those councils have done nothing to bring expenditure under control or to get better value for money, they blame everything on the Government.

Such instructions went out to Labour councils from Walworth road, and the Labour party in London decided to try to make the community charge as high as possible in order to put as much blame as possible on the Government. They suffered for that in the local government elections. It is not surprising that Labour wants the community charge to go—not just the bad bits but the good bits as well.

Mr. Illsley: Where is the proof?

Mr. Hughes: Hon. Members should talk to some of the Labour local government leaders in London. They will admit that their strategy was to try to impose as high a charge as possible.

Mr. Illsley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is not a London Member, but I shall give way to him.

Mr. Illsley: An authority in my constituency was poll tax-capped. We do not want to ask the leaders of the local authorities. We are asking the hon. Gentleman for the proof of his statement.

Mr. Hughes: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman would not know much about London. There are precious few London Members in the Chamber. There is only one Opposition London Member, and perhaps he will intervene to suggest that I am wrong. I know, and the Opposition know, about the strategy adopted by the Labour party.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My hon. Friend is a community charge payer in the London borough of Ealing, with which I used to be associated. Does he remember that, in the 1980s, when Conservatives were in charge of Ealing and I was chairman of the finance committee, we were able to boast that we had the lowest rates in west London? When Labour won control for four short, expensive years in 1986, its first action was to remove that phrase from the council's literature, because it determined no longer to have the lowest rates in west London. That is indicative of the high-cost, inefficient, doctrinaire policies that the Labour party followed in local government throughout London.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is right. Empirical evidence could be produced to show that I was more in favour of the community charge than any of my hon. Friends. If that were not the case, I would not have chosen to live in Ealing and to have a flat in Lambeth, because I am paying a higher community charge than anyone I know.

More evidence is available from Labour local government leaders. The leader of Camden council, Mr. Tony Dykes, said on 18 September 1987:

"Since 1982 our staffing has increased by 2,000 people and we have regraded thousands of staff upwards since 1985. Yet no member of the Labour Group can pretend that services are 2,000 staff better or x per cent. growth better".

Mr. Battle: What was the date?

Mr. Hughes: I gave the date. The hon. Gentleman will have to read *Hansard* to find it out.

In the same year, the leader of Southwark council, Ms. Anne Matthews, who is well known for reading comics in her spare time, said:

"The money spent in many areas is wasted."

Many people in Southwark will agree with that. She continued:

"The services are demonstrably poor and give no reason why people in Southwark should trust the Labour party to run the council".

That was proved in the last local government elections when the Labour party fared disastrously in Southwark. It managed to hang on to control, but I do not think that in any London area Labour fared so badly.

A more recent piece of evidence is a document entitled "Labour Councils in the Cold" of January 1988, which was produced by the Labour party's co-ordinating committee. One passage reads:

"When the local council wants to carry out a programme of service expansion, local people will no longer be cushioned by increased business rates and rate support grant. They will want to know that increased expenditure is well spent."

That is the crux of the argument.

The Bill is a modest measure that is designed to put into effect what we thought was the effect of the community charge legislation. Opposition Members oppose it strenuously because they know that their fox has been shot. They know that the money that is spent by councils and the value for money that is achieved by them are open for the public to see. They know that, whatever might be wrong with the community charge—it is clear that we shall review those things—there are two basic principles that are right.

They know that the public will see what is being spent on their behalf, and they know also that those who come within Labour-controlled councils will not like what they see. That is why they consider the Bill to be heinous. They know as well that the only people from whom increased expenditure can be raised are community charge payers. The people who are expected to elect Labour-controlled councils are those who will have to pay the bill. Naturally Labour Members do not like that. Labour party policy cannot live with open and honest debate about the party's policies.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Why do we need the Bill? What went wrong earlier? When a court decided in favour of Lambeth council, why was it discovered that, from the

Government's point of view, the Bill was defective? When we considered in Committee the Bill that introduced the poll tax, 47 civil servants were involved. We debated the poll tax until it came out of our ears. It seemed that nothing else was being discussed throughout the nation. Yet the Government could not get it right, and we are told now that this silly little Bill is necessary.

Mr. Hughes: I am sure that the House will be glad to know that the hon. Gentleman knows what is coming out of his ears. It is what comes out of his mouth that worries us.

Lambeth council introduced a community charge which it knew was not to fund good quality services. Indeed, it was not designed to do so. It knew also that the people of Lambeth could not afford it. The Government sought to reduce the bills that they faced and the Labour party fought and fought again through the courts to keep the bills as high as it could. The Labour party believes in high charges and low-quality services.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way yet again.

One of the councils that could be affected by the Bill is Brent. Is my hon. Friend aware that in that Labour-controlled council rent arrears amount to 48 per cent. of the annual rent roll? Does he agree that, if it ran its affairs more efficiently and collected the backlog of rent, it could have a lower community charge and a better housing service?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend has introduced an extremely important consideration. It has been central to the arguments of Opposition Members that the community charge is difficult to collect. I understand that that is so, because more people are paying it than those who paid rates previously. If the position is worse in that respect, it is only because some Labour-controlled councils have made no attempt to collect the charge. That is costing the people who live in Labour-controlled boroughs a great deal of money. It seems that the Labour party's policy is designed to damage services.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Name one such authority.

Mr. Hughes: It is my experience that anyone who wants to pay his community charge in Lambeth will find it extremely difficult to do so.

Mr. Rooney: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Bill applicable only to London boroughs? Surely it affects the poll tax legislation generally and not only the London boroughs, to which the hon. Gentleman refers almost constantly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have heard much today that has been out of order to some degree. I do not think that the speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is very different from what I heard earlier.

Mr. Hughes: That was uncharacteristically ungenerous of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I take your point.

As the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) says, the Bill will affect the entire country, but I am entitled to speak about London; I am a London Member. Not all the worst councils are in London, but there are many pretty dreadful Labour-controlled councils to be found in the capital. If Labour Members want to say that the councils in their constituencies outside London are as bad as some of the London councils, I shall be happy to hear them say that.

The Labour-controlled councils that I have been talking about do not want to collect the community charge. They do not want to have the money available to pay for services. They want merely to blame everything on the Government. There is plenty of evidence, from Labour councillors and leaders of Labour councils ensuring that they make their position clear to the public, that they do not mind whether or not they pay the community charge. That is why that argument is important, and that is why the Government must have the power, where necessary, to tell such irresponsible councils what amount of money is involved.

I wish to cite one more quotation, which is about the London borough of Islington—hardly a star in the Labour firmament, but one that should be remembered by the Labour party and the country. It is taken from a Queen's counsel's report on Islington, not in 1987 or 1988, but in October of this year. It states:

> "Having the cash office staffed by the innumerate, the filing done by the dyslexic and disorganised, and reception by the surly or charmless seems to us a recipe for administrative chaos."

That could apply to many Labour councils, both in or out of London. They do not care about the people in their areas. They do not care how much money they take from them. All they care about is staffing and spending money on their pet projects.

The Bill is designed to protect people, and it will protect people. Whatever the Labour party might say, we are determined that the people of this country will be protected against the Labour party.

9.5 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) was one of the worst that I have ever heard. He does not realise what he is saying. He does his Government a great disservice by saying that they cannot control Labour councils which, he claims, have not collected any poll tax this year. It is an incredible statement. If it is true, the Government need to sort out the Department of the Environment because, obviously, it is at fault. The least said about the hon. Gentleman's contribution the better.

I wish to discuss the whole concept of poll tax capping and the basis for it. Every time, the basis of charge capping comes down to the standard spending assessment. On numerous occasions I have tried to explain to the Government that the basis for and the calculation of SSA are wrong and give rise to anomalous results. Barnsley has an increase of 19 per cent. on the SSA. It is higher than the average increase for the metropolitan district areas, but lower than the national average. Once again, Barnsley ranks 36 out of the 36 metropolitan districts for SSA per adult. It is at the bottom of the league table, as it was last year. There will be charge capping again because of the Government's restriction on the SSA.

I wish to make a simple comparison between Barnsley and the SSAs for other authorities. In 1990-91, Barnsley's SSA was 58·7 per cent. of Manchester's. For 1991-92, that proportion has been reduced to 56 per cent. There is a decreasing gap compared with West Sussex. West Sussex had 91 per cent. of Barnsley's SSA in 1990-91, but the proportion has now risen to 94 per cent. For the

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

forthcoming year, on a flat rate per adult of revenue support grant, there will be a decrease of £6·4 million on 1990-91. The grant has been reduced by £21 per adult. Barnsley will also lose the safety net and the area protection grant, which amounts to a vast sum of money.

A summary of central funding shows that revenue support grant has decreased by 12·4 per cent.; contributions from the safety net pool and the special low rateable value grant have decreased by 16·4 per cent.; and non-domestic rates have decreased by 19 per cent., giving a net decrease of 2 per cent. That compares with inflation of 10 per cent. If one assumes no significant downturn in inflation the following year, that will produce a decrease in real terms of £8 million, or £48 per adult poll tax. It is hardly surprising that Barnsley once again ranks 36th out of the 36 metropolitan authorities.

Under the Government's criteria for capping, we shall be allowed a 7 per cent. increase in our capped budget level of £132 million, giving us a capping avoidance target of £141 million—a cash increase of £9·2 million. That is not enough even to fund the effects of current inflation.

Barnsley and the other authorities that form part of the so-called Webber Craig authorities—Rotherham, Doncaster, Sheffield, St. Helens, Wakefield and Wigan—commissioned a survey to determine why it was that we were at the end of the standard spending assessments. The answer was that SSAs fail the test of common sense. They overstate the difference in cost between local authority areas in providing a standard level of service, and place too much reliance on out-of-date and irrelevant data. For example, SSA figures are based on the 1981 population census, which make them nearly 10 years old.

Standard spending assessments also fail to recognise the problems which have confronted those authorities and which they have tried to put over to the Government. I will give one or two examples of alarming differences, and I hope to describe the study in greater detail in Committee.

The cost of running a primary school of 300 children is £58,000 a year, or about £1,000 a week, cheaper in Wakefield than in Bradford. Why does it cost £1,000 a week more to run a school in Bradford than in Wakefield? The cost of running a secondary school of 1,000 children is £278,000 per year, or £10,000 per week, less in Wakefield than in Bradford. What accounts for the tremendous difference between those comparable authorities?

As to personal social services, Wigan is supposed to provide the same standard of service as Manchester at 60 per cent. of Manchester's unit cost. Wigan is allowed £1,925 per child at risk compared with £3,223 for Manchester. It is plain to see that the basis of the comparison is ridiculous.

Similar anomalies are to be found throughout the study. The education standard spending assessments for 1991-92 total almost £15 billion. About 24 per cent. is allocated between local education authorities on the basis of what are called additional educational needs. That element of SSAs is allocated according to the proportion of under-18s living in single parent families, based on 1981 census data; the proportion of dependent children from families receiving income support; and the proportion of under-18s, also based on 1981 census data, who were born outside the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States of America or the old Commonwealth, or whose head of household was born outside those areas.

In view of the time, I shall not go into detail on this question and the issues raised by the report compiled by Coopers and Lybrand and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. I hope that I shall be able to go into more detail in Committee, and to highlight more anomalies between the standard spending assessments in my authority and the assessments in others, such as the city of Manchester, where far more money is allowed.

The principle of the Bill is accountability. If the Government rely upon accountability and the ballot box to decide poll tax levels, the Bill should be scrapped, charge capping should be scrapped, and in future it should be left to the ballot box.

9.14 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I have been told that I should keep my speech to about three minutes, so I shall make only three points. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) mentioned standard spending assessments. It is quite obvious that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who spoke earlier, does not understand the function and the operation of that formula in Derbyshire, or anywhere else, despite her claimed experience of local government.

The formula uses a number of criteria, such as sparsity and density of population. Dense population in an area might mean that extra money is required, so an extra grant is provided. If the population is very sparse, extra expenditure might also be required, so extra grant is provided. However, if an area is an intricate mixture of sparse and dense population it fails to fit into either category and does not qualify for either grant. My constituency in north-east Derbyshire has precisely that structure, as does Derbyshire as a whole.

In addition, there are provisions for social deprivation —inadequate provisions—but they do not operate in middle-class areas. Therefore, if a working-class population which suffers from deprivation is mixed in with a middle class area—as is the case in Derbyshire—the authority fails to qualify for grants.

Furthermore, grant is taken away from an area if people leave it to go to work. Areas into which people move to work gain grants. In Derbyshire, especially in the north of the county, many people go to Sheffield for work, and so my constituency loses grant. That is why we end up with nonsensical formulas. Even the formula for south Derbyshire—the hon. Lady's constituency—means that, according to Government figures, the standard spending assessment percentages work out at 14 per cent. from revenue support grant, 41 per cent. from business rate and 45 per cent. from poll tax.

Yet we were told that 50 per cent. would come from revenue support and 25 per cent. from the other two areas, including the poll tax. Because of the vast disparity in revenue support grant, one injustice is built upon another and a flat rate tax has become a very high flat rate tax. Perhaps something could be done about the high rate, but it will remain a flat rate tax.

The principle of a flat rate tax produces the other problem that we face because of the poll tax—masses of people are missing from the electoral register because of its

link with the tax. Figures show that there is a shortfall of 600,000 people, missing from the current electoral register, and information suggests that many more will be missing from the new register. Because of the resultant lack of democratic involvement that is a serious crisis for our constitution.

I wonder whether, during the review of the poll tax, which we are supposed to start discussing on Wednesday, anyone will explain how we can begin to refranchise people once they have been disfranchised by this measure. The poll tax has set in motion something which it will be very difficult to put right.

I hope that the Minister will pay some attention to the state of the electoral register, and give us some sign of what is to be done. The Bill is hopeless and useless. If we are to review the poll tax, and if a new system is to be introduced, it is nonsense to plough on with this measure. On Wednesday we may be told that the tax no longer exists. We have had some nonsensical debates in this House.

I can remember one occasion when we discussed for two hours a Bill which did not exist in the Vote Office, so we had to stop the debate. Now we are discussing something which may not exist by Wednesday. Sometimes it is like Monty Python's Flying Circus in here. The Minister had better start to put things right. If he does not, he will be our third successive municipal Mussolini since the introduction of the legislation. Time and again, power has been centralised: it has been repeatedly pushed into the hands of the Government.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The Under-Secretary of State was under the misapprehension that I was going to make him speak for about 40 minutes. He was terrified in case he ran out of equations and other algebraic formulas with which to blind us with science.

I congratulate Conservative Front Benchers who have retained their places, and also—in their absence—those who have gained theirs. The gobbledegook that we are discussing cannot hide the divisions in the Conservative party—the differences between one Minister of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), and another, new, Minister of State, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young); the differences between the new Conservative party chairman, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), and the new Secretary of State for the Environment; the differences between the new Secretary of State and the Prime Minister; and, indeed, the differences between Tory Members, within their own ranks, the Department of the Environment and the Government.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman repeat that list?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not need to. There are so many divisions. Wherever we look, we see sections of the Conservative party that are confused about their beliefs about the poll tax.

It must be said for the Minister of State that he has been consistent. He knows where he stands, and, like the last Secretary of State but one, he actually believes in it. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) quoted one extract from his speech to the Conservative party conference; I am sure that the Minister will forgive me if I quote another. He said:

"When the Prime Minister"—

referring to the last one—

"offers you a hot potato, there is only one thing to be said. 'Take responsibility for the community charge, Prime Minister? There is nothing in the whole world I would rather do.'"

He went on to say:

"The funny thing is, I meant it."

That is a strange phenomenon—someone who says that he believes in the poll tax and will fight for it. Those of us who will serve on the Standing Committee want to ensure that the Minister will have plenty of time to spend in the Department doing just that. We know that there will be a battle over the future of the poll tax, and we know that Conservative Members will be debating among themselves how to get out of the corner into which they have dug themselves.

We know that the Secretary of State feels differently from both his predecessor and many of his present colleagues about the abolition of the poll tax. Nothing would suit him better—as I am sure we can imagine him saying when he was offered the job—than to be able to get rid of it. We can imagine the Prime Minister replying, "Just steady on a minute, Michael: it is not abolition that we are after, but a smoke screen in the form of minor amendments"—and what the Under-Secretary of State mentioned during the most recent Environment Questions: jam tomorrow. That is what it is all about.

The new Secretary of State will be aware of the difficulties that he faces. That is why we are seeing a barrage of different proposals aimed at diverting attention from the reality—proposals for education spending to be taken out of the hands of local government, for instance, supported by those who have long wanted it to be taken out of the public sector altogether. We understand that the Secretary of State, who denounced that proposal in an article in *The Times* last May, is now in favour of it. We also understand that he wants to tinker with the position relating to transitional relief, rebates for elderly people, for those with disabilities and for those whom he described in May as living over the shop.

That is about all that is left in the regulations that the House is due to debate in perhaps a few weeks' time—the remnants of the last review. All that is clear. We see before us confusion, uncertainty, division and duplicity. A united Opposition know where they are going and what they are committed to, whereas the Government no longer have any principles left to them.

Conservative Members "support" most of the principles that underlie the tax. I refer not to that which is now paraded as the principle—that everyone should pay something, which has been aided and abetted by BBC commentators who have emerged on the scene since the poll tax became an exciting issue—but to the principle that was spelt out again and again in the House by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) when the Bill was debated on the Floor of the House and in Committee: that most people should pay a flat rate contribution.

With few exceptions, that was to be the principle. Because of public pressure, there are a few more exceptions now. As a consequence of the principle that the vast majority of people should pay a flat rate, those with lower incomes find that much of their earnings is swallowed up in the poll tax, while those who earn more pay, as a proportion of their earnings, a great deal less.

[Mr. Blunkett]

Apart from the fact that the Bill is a petty and mean little measure, the poll tax issue, and capping, ought to have been debated today as well as on Wednesday. The Bill is about capping. We were promised that the poll tax would lead to accountability, but we never got it. The Bill is an attempt to deal with the confusion and bewilderment that we said many years ago would arise because of the Government's attempt to meddle with local government finance. The introduction of even more restrictions has led to confusion and difficulty of implementation.

The problem was highlighted when the Scottish poll tax Bill was debated. Many hon. Members, including the Secretary of State, appear to have forgotten that there was a Scottish Bill. However, many hon. Members remember those long nights, in 1988, often until about 2 am, when we debated what would happen if the poll tax provisions were implemented and if capping—introduced halfway through the proceedings on the Bill—were imposed. We said again and again that capping would lead to the confusion that faces us now. All those who have held the post of Secretary of State for the Environment believed that poll tax capping was bad.

On 25 March 1990, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury asked:

"Should Government stop councils from this (overspending) or should people who elect councils stop them? I think it should be the latter."

Who could disagree with the right hon. Gentleman? Three days later the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the former Secretary of State for the Environment, said—not to be outdone—that

"the best place for resolving these capping issues is in the ballot box."

Who could disagree with him? As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said so ably at the beginning of the debate, the new Secretary of State for the Environment has made it abundantly clear that he too does not believe in poll tax capping.

Who, therefore, believes in poll tax capping? Enough Conservative Members who trooped through the Lobby when the legislation was debated in this place believe in it. Moreover, enough Conservative Members have repeated, in different ways today, that they believe in clobbering —as I believe the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) would put it—Labour councils. Tory Members are not interested in accountability or local democracy any more. They are willing to sacrifice all to centralism, increased bureaucratic power and litigation which have become predominant in the past few years as a substitute for genuine political debate. Pluralism and diversity are sacrificed to give more power to the hands of a few, supposedly for the benefit of the many.

Lambeth had an all-out election to determine what people wanted. I do not suppose that that matters, although the new Secretary of State says that he believes in all-out elections to determine whether a council should override what the Government believe it should spend. Hardly anybody seems to believe in capping and many people believe in all-out elections as a way of testing public opinion. Judges have determined that Lambeth was right and had acted reasonably and sensibly, but the Bill will have exactly the opposite effect.

The poll tax is affected by so many factors, such as the removal of equalisation between different parts of the country and the standard spending assessment, which so many hon. Members have referred to and which can affect quite dramatically poll tax poundage. The four different possible packages for standard spending assessment could have resulted in a council such as Hackney have a poll tax of £48 or £606. In inner London, the difference in the preferred packages for the standard spending assessment between the Association of County Councils and the Association of London Authorities was a staggering £326 in each poll tax. Those large sums of money affect the debate about whether poll tax capping and the poll tax are relevant or whether the Bill is simply a diversion from the issues that we should be dealing with.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The hon. Gentleman has spent much time telling us why the community charge should not be capped. Does he accept that the power to cap is on the statute book? The Bill deals with whether the reduced budget should be passed on to charge payers. Does he believe that a reduction in budget, enforced by charge capping, should be passed on to charge payers or used to build up the coffers of the local authority?

Mr. Blunkett: The Bill stems directly from capping. It is not about building up reserves—that cannot be taken into account in the capping process to determine how much has been used year on year—but about how much is in the charge fund and whether it is legal for a council to take account of the changes that have occurred in the period between the original budget-setting meeting and the imposition of capping on the authority. That is the crunch in the Bill.

When Haringey council originally determined its poll tax, it did not have a report on the possible impact of capping on collection rates and on resistance to the poll tax in its area. Lambeth had such a report, and the judges rightly picked out the way in which it had dealt with it and commended it for its "utmost care" in determining how it set its new poll tax level. Lambeth councillors realised that the poll tax, as originally set, would lead to considerable difficulty in collection.

The Minister suggested that councils ought to be able to collect 100 per cent. of the poll tax. If the Bill is based on that assumption, we are living in cloud cuckoo land. I have believed for many years that we are, indeed, living in cloud cuckoo land, but it is incumbent on a Minister who dictates directly to local government the exact poundage that it should levy to have some idea about the difficulties of collecting the tax, which were spelt out by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser).

No one believes that 100 per cent. collection is possible. No one believes that it is possible in Lambeth. Even a lad from Lambeth running Lambeth from No. 10 instead of from the local town hall could not believe that a 100 per cent. collection rate was possible in Lambeth. Before we debate the Bill in Committee, the Minister should have a word with the Prime Minister about what it is like in Brixton. The Prime Minister might be able to tell him a thing or two about the difficulties. He will certainly be able to tell him that those in Lambeth town hall are not daft. They may disagree with the Minister on fundamentals, but they got it right, and they got it right in court.

We should not be debating this Bill, or deciding what minor regulations the Government might pass before the general election, had it not been for the court case. Now we

have a mathematical formula, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) dealt with so ably. It is an Orwellian dream come true:

"In subsection (3)—

(a) in paragraph (c) for the word "other" there shall be substituted the word "qualifying" and after the word "above" there shall be inserted the words "or under this section";

(b) paragraph (d) shall be omitted.

(3) The following subsections shall be inserted after subsection (3)—

"(3A) In a case where the precept mentioned in subsection (1) above is issued under section 107(2) below, subsection (3) above shall not apply but subsection (3B) below shall apply.

(3B) In such a case, any amount set in substitution under subsection (1) above must be set in accordance (and only in accordance) with the formula—

$$A - \frac{(B - C)}{D}$$

where A, B, C and D have the meanings given by section 35A below."

I congratulate the parliamentary draftsmen on the Bill. It is that kind of nonsense that makes people think that those of us engaged in democratic political debate have lost our marbles. Having had to sit through most of the debate tonight, I am certainly in danger of losing mine.

The Bill stems directly from people's resistance to a tax which is unfair and unadministrable. That resistance finds expression in the electorate's commitment to ensuring that they get rid of the tax in the one way that they know is certain to succeed—by voting out the Government and ensuring that we have a Labour Government next time.

Instead of reverting to the rational assumptions that all of us expected following the leadership battle, Conservative Members have deserted common sense and decided to do what most of us would describe as fiddling while Rome burns. In local government, we have a whistle blower. We now have a trumpet blower on the Government Front Bench and those who fiddle while the world goes on around them. While that happens, people outside are suffering. Services are being cut and things that matter to people are being destroyed.

The Government may be taking the powers that they want to determine every last detail of local government spending. In taking those powers, they are not displaying wisdom, understanding or caring. They do not understand the consequences of what they are doing.

Councils must balance their books, and decisions must be taken on how to ensure that services are protected. Instead, we discuss minute algebraic formulas about how the Government can have their way. Most people outside this place, if they could hear this debate, would understand that this is a petty little Bill and that its petty mentors should be rejected at the first possible opportunity.

It is not the amendment of the tax but its outright abolition that we shall seek to achieve in the general election. There is only one choice. It does not lie with those who want to amend the legislation slightly; it does not lie with those who want to hide behind smoke screens or to engage in political expediency. It lies with those who have constantly and continuously rejected the poll tax, who have argued against it and who have a clear alternative which accords with the views of the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We will be able to do something about it. We will abolish the poll tax as soon as we are elected to office. The choice is clear. We believe in what we are doing, and we will ensure that we do it at the first opportunity.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): This has been an extremely good-natured and largely constructive debate. I hope very much that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) does not lose his marbles, as that would be most distressing for all of us, not least because we have learnt to respect his contribution to the local government debate. I have already had an opportunity to meet him in a statutory instruments Standing Committee. I look forward to many more happy hours, happy months and happy years, with the hon. Gentleman on the Opposition Front Bench and me on the Government Front Bench.

The hon. Member for Brightside and I have several things in common. I suspect that we both enjoy working in local government. That does not come easily to some people on both sides of the House, but to him and me it is important to begin from the standpoint of believing in what we are doing and enjoying it.

I have a high regard for what is best in local government. In the few weeks that I have held this office, I have learned from my experience and from the people whom I have met in many of our great cities, including Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield and London, and in the shire counties that are my home and the part of the country that I represent.

I suspect that we face a dichotomy. Either we accept that there must be common ground between politicians on both sides in the interests of the people whom we serve or we can have localised skirmishes in the House and forget the interests of the people in the communities that we represent. The hon. Member for Brightside said that councils must balance their books and, like me, he clearly has realistic aspirations for local councils.

However, the debate has ranged widely and too often it ignored the fact that this is a short Bill with a simple purpose—that is, to protect charge payers by ensuring that authorities can no longer seek to deprive charge payers of the full benefits of capping. It amends existing law by prescribing exactly how charges must be set after capping, thereby guaranteeing that the cuts that an authority must make because of capping will lead to commensurate reductions in charges.

The Bill requires authorities to use a formula that gives no flexibility or discretion to authorities to cheat hard-pressed local people. The arithmetic is not particularly difficult. I noted with interest the contrast between the difficulty described by the hon. Member for Brightside and the view expressed by his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser).

The important point is that the Bill does not affect our existing powers to cap local authorities. It complements them, to control local spending and protect local people from the effects of excessive budgets, by ensuring that they derive the full benefit of the Government's intervention on their behalf.

We have heard much from Opposition Members about how the Bill is a further attack on local government. There have been wild assertions that the Bill is the final nail in the coffin of local democracy. The truth is entirely different. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities made clear, the Government have always held that local authority spending cannot be exempt from control, as the hon. Member for Brightside has just confirmed. Parliament has given us powers to do that. We

[Mr. Robert Key]

have used those powers and we shall not hesitate to do so again if necessary. The Bill does not alter that position. It ensures that local people will be fully protected from their council if, disregarding their interests, it chooses to budget excessively.

Mr. Nellist: Is not the essence of the Bill the fact that Lambeth said this summer that it could not see itself collecting any more than 85 per cent. of the poll tax and that the Government said that it should be able to collect 100 per cent.? The Bill gives the Secretary of State power to set poll tax levels that local councils would not be able to vary. Has the Under-Secretary of State looked, as I looked this afternoon, at the figures for Scotland, which is one year ahead with the poll tax, and realised that, in October last year, the amount of uncollected poll tax was £142 million or 14·7 per cent. of the poll tax and that, this October, it was £623 million or 59·2 per cent. of the poll tax? Is not that a demonstration that councils that are trying to tell the Government that the poll tax is essentially uncollectable have only to look to Scotland for the lesson?

Mr. Key: I do not know whether to be grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Member for Brightside said that he was afraid that I would run out of notes. With interventions of that length, there is no danger of my doing that. I shall refer to the hon. Gentleman's point about Lambeth in one moment.

One of the interesting things that has happened in recent weeks is that I have met several delegations from local authorities who have complained about several points, such as their standard spending assessments and the indicators that are used to make them up. It has become clear to me that, as local authorities have come to recognise the way in which the system works, they have become very much more sophisticated in their criticism of the indicators and have come to present their worries and fears to the Government. That is all part of the system. That is what it is about. That is what the consultation exercise has been about.

On Lambeth in particular, the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) talked about the problem of the collection of rates under the old rating system. Let me give the House some examples of rate arrears now outstanding for 1988-89, the latest year for which figures are available. The hon. Gentleman referred to Bath in particular. The figure for Bath is 0·8 per cent. outstanding, for Westminster it is 2·6 per cent. outstanding, and for Wandsworth it is 8·1 per cent. outstanding. The hon. Gentleman should contrast those efficient Conservative-controlled authorities with Lambeth's 20 per cent. outstanding and the 12·7 per cent. for Liverpool. I sometimes wonder about Lambeth, as do my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn).

Not the Government, but the council's senior official, said that the financial difficulties in Lambeth were near catastrophic, and he criticised the corruptness of its administrative system. He said that the final accounts for Lambeth had not been prepared for any year since 1985 and that, with less than half the poll tax collected, its financial position was dire.

According to the *Local Government Chronicle*, the council's report said that Lambeth's poll tax register was out of date, listing properties that had been demolished, some of which lie outside the borough boundaries. It warned that, the local council must issue more than 40,000 poll tax bills that have yet to be sent out and urged the borough to take tough action with defaulters to stave off a financial crisis. Furthermore, the senior officer said that the introduction and the handling of the poll tax had been woefully inadequate, with officers having to force members into taking decisions. That is not something of which any council should be proud, whatever its political colour.

I was sorry that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), who is not in his place, thought it necessary to parade a lot of problems affecting Eastbourne when he did not take the trouble to bring a delegation to see me, along with many other councils from all sides of the political spectrum. Therefore, we do not know the substance of the hon. Gentleman's problem.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made it clear that he saw the Bill's purpose as being

"to make the poll tax cap fit even tighter".

Much of his speech was based on that assertion. Even with the wildest imagination, I cannot see how the hon. Gentleman can conclude that the purpose of the Bill is to tighten the fit of a cap. The Bill does not affect the existing powers to cap local authorities. Nor does it affect the way in which we should approach the exercise of our capping powers. It does not even mean a change in the way in which a capped authority should approach reducing its budget to conform with the cap set for it. Therefore, the cap is neither tighter nor looser. The Bill simply ensures that, once a capped authority has received its budget and revised it, it must pass on to its charge payers the full benefit of those budget reductions.

I remind the hon. Gentleman of the quotation from the Leader of the Opposition that we have often heard recently. His right hon. Friend referred to the "most unjust" of all taxes, the local rates, which take the most from those who can afford least. Many right hon. and hon Members of all parties have stated that it is impossible to achieve a 100 per cent. level of collection. Perhaps that is the case, but the objective of every council should be to try to achieve 100 per cent. It is preposterous to justify non-collection on the grounds that it is not possible to achieve 100 per cent.

One of the more interesting contributions was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who talked about the cost of collection to local people. I was pleased to note that a report from the Audit Commission a couple of months ago gave a lot of useful advice to local authorities. The cost of collection varies astonishingly from one local authority to another—from about £5 per head to about £20 a head—and that has nothing to do with the political colour of the controlling party in the local authority. It has a great deal to do with the efficiency of collection and with the interest taken by the authority in carrying out that collection.

Mr. Allen McKay: Is it not a fact that the expense incurred is not so much that of the actual collection, but the cost of the software and that involved in setting up the computer system?

Mr. Key: There have been computer software problems, but most of them have been ironed out. The most significant factor in the variation in the cost of collection lies in the nature of the constituency. I accept that collection is more expensive in, for example, urban

areas. There is no argument about that. As was the case with rates, it is more expensive to collect the community charge where there is a large and mobile population. Although I accept that, there is still enormous room for efficiency improvements.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) spoke about a backlash against non-payers. That is clearly growing, and it is something that Opposition Members who refuse to pay their community charge should start considering seriously.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made an important speech, which I very much enjoyed. Although he criticised the Bill for being absurd and full of complex detail, in his next breath he complained about a lack of attention to detail. His comparison with other Community countries was very important. He asked why our country alone appears to have such a complex system.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is fully aware of some of the complexities of the systems in other countries. In some countries, local government receives a prescribed proportion of national income tax, redistributed according to the tax-raising capacity of the region, as in Austria or Germany, or as a grant according to need, as in Japan. Japan also has an inhabitant's tax, accounting for 48 per cent. of local income tax and comprising a flat-rate charge and an income-related element. It is no good simply to argue against complexity in such cases.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on his important contribution. He said that a large number of Labour authorities have been able to reduce their expenditure without the cuts in services about which some of them have circulated stories in a thoroughly scaremongering fashion.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The Minister is making a strong case in favour of the poll tax. Does he still believe in the poll tax or will he take the view of his constituent, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who says that it is a Tory tax that should be smashed?

Mr. Key: I agree absolutely, and think that most people would agree that there should be a tax for local services paid for by the vast majority of people. Such a tax is absolutely right, and I continue to support it.

Mr. Blunkett: To help the Minister pad out his material, I shall ask him whether, if he believes in that principle, he still believes in the principle of the flat rate.

Mr. Key: Oh, yes. I certainly believe in the principle of a flat-rate tax as long as, as in the case of the community charge, about one quarter of all those who pay it are subject to a rebate system. That is exactly the sort of system that we want and I look forward to further refinements.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) talked about Lambeth's incompetence and the need to look at Bristol. If we do so, we can see how well the authority has done. The figures for Bristol show that the citizens of the hon. Lady's constituency have benefited by about £88 each under the present arrangements. She also made serious points about the Lambeth legal case and judgment and referred to the judges, who were dealing with the law as it stood.

Tonight, we are debating the principle of whether a local authority should be able to deny its charge payers the full benefit of budget reductions made as a result of capping. The issue is clear. What motive can there be for seeking to deny hard-pressed charge payers the full benefits of capping? There can be no justification for denying them that. The pinciple enshrined in the Bill is clear and right.

Mr. Holt: Today's debate should have been about capping. During the contribution of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), I asked him whether a Labour Government would place any ceiling on local council expenditure. He dodged that question; he is not listening now—that is the measure of the man.

Mr. Key: I think that the hon. Member for Brightside had the right idea when he said that councils had to balance their books.

The hon. Member for Norwood referred to a double cut being brought about by the Bill. He suggested that the Bill would lead to a capped authority having to make further cuts to its budget in addition to those required by the cap to allow for non-collection. That is not the case —the Bill does not change the way in which an authority is capped. I shall give details in writing of how that system will work because I do not have time now.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nottingham, South on his contribution and am glad that he, like me, has no sympathy for the "won't pay" brigade. His constituents are fortunate to have someone like him to represent their interests in the House.

The hon. Member for Brightside was kind enough to give me warning of his speech in a press release issued this morning, in which he described the Bill as "gobbledygook, a lawyer's parasite"—*[Laughter.]*—paradise, I should have said. He said that the Bill was mathematical nonsense. I refer him to his hon. Friend the Member for Norwood.

The Bill is an important measure to guarantee protection to charge payers from councils that do not care how much they spend or about the burdens that they place on local people. The Government care, and that is why we have introduced this worthwhile Bill, which I call on the House to support.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time: *The House divided:* Ayes 307, Noes 224.

Division No. 16] **[10 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Blackburn, Dr John G.
Alexander, Richard	Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Allason, Rupert	Body, Sir Richard
Amery, Rt Hon Julian	Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Amess, David	Boscawen, Hon Robert
Amos, Alan	Boswell, Tim
Arbuthnot, James	Bottomley, Peter
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Ashby, David	Bowis, John
Aspinwall, Jack	Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Atkins, Robert	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Atkinson, David	Brazier, Julian
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Bright, Graham
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Baldry, Tony	Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Batiste, Spencer	Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Bellingham, Henry	Buck, Sir Antony
Bendall, Vivian	Budgen, Nicholas
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Burns, Simon
Bevan, David Gilroy	Burt, Alistair
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Butcher, John

Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob

Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill and the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill

Ordered for Second Reading read.

10.15 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is a technical measure, which will be welcomed by a substantial number of holiday caravan owners who, contrary to our intention in 1988, are, as the law now stands, liable to the standard community charge. During the consideration of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Government gave a commitment that holiday caravans and the pitches on which they stand would be non-domestic-rated. It subsequently emerged that an amendment that we made to the then Bill did not have the desired effect and that the owners of many holiday caravans were subject to the standard community charge.

The Bill therefore removes all standard charge liability from the owners of caravans that are not used as a sole or main residence. Instead, it makes all caravan pitches and the caravans occupying them, which are not used as a sole or main residence, subject to non-domestic rates. As we announced on 30 March, the provisions will have effect retrospectively to 1 April 1990. Anyone who has paid the standard charge in respect of a caravan will be entitled to have that sum refunded.

The Bill includes separate provisions for Scotland, and which have the same effect as those south of the border. Two further provisions are proposed that are specific to Scotland. First, because some caravan owners paid the standard charge last year, provision is made for repayment of half that amount. Secondly, a minor change is needed to the existing provisions on the derating of caravans to permit my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dumfermline, West): Are the Government conceding the principle of retrospectivity for Scotland? If so, should not that example be followed in other measures that might be considered within the Minister's Department?

Mr. Portillo: The Bill has retrospective effect in England, Wales and Scotland. It has an additional retrospective element for Scotland. I do not envisage any connection between this Bill and any other legislation that the Government might or might not bring before the House.

A minor change is needed to the existing provisions on the derating of caravans to permit my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to deal with the fact that the rateable values of caravans in Scotland are, in general, higher than those in England and Wales. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.19 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This Bill is another attempt to adjust the poll tax, this time in respect of caravans. It is a further example of the Government, having got the poll tax wrong, making a slight amendment. It may be of help to some, but there are other issues that the Minister must address.

The Local Government Finance Act 1988 made reference also to holiday chalets on caravan sites, and we were given to understand that chalets were encompassed by the provisions for caravans. In Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill in February 1988, mention was made of the significant problems that would arise in respect of caravans and chalets. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) warned of the serious consequences of neglecting consideration of such properties. Unless we provide for them now, we shall all be back in a few months' time debating them again.

The explanatory and financial memorandum states that clause 1 repeals

"other references to caravans in consequence."

It refers also to caravans

"other than those used as a sole or main residence".

The same applies in principle to chalets, so may we presume that chalets are included in the provisions for the standard rate of poll tax that applies to caravans?

The sites concerned are not protected, have planning permission or site licences for holiday use only, or are those on which year-round occupation is prohibited. Those terms apply to chalets just as much as to caravans. The residents of chalets, like those of caravans, have only limited services provided to them by local authorities, so they pay for services that they do not receive. The Government criterion that people should pay for the services provided was an element in our debates on the standard charges. People who own or occupy chalets have no votes in the county or district in which those properties are located, so local authority members are not accountable to them.

Chalet owners in the Southcliffe area of Skipsey in east Yorkshire paid £189 in rates in the year 1988-89. However, the poll tax payable on those same properties is £326 per person. Because the local authority charges double poll tax in line with the Government's formula, a retired single person who occupies a chalet for a few weeks during the year must pay £652 in poll tax, in comparison with £180 under the old rating system. That is an increase in one year of £470.

In Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said:

"A similar but rather more serious problem will arise with caravans and chalets. I am talking about not the sort of chalet accommodation with which hon. Members may be familiar from such television programmes as 'Hi-De-Hi', but the rather more sophisticated accommodation that is available in holiday centres. That, too, is a rapidly expanding sector of the leisure and tourism industry in the United Kingdom. Again, the law is not clear and I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend will advise us further.

It seems possible that chalets used for that sort of accommodation may be deemed to be residences under the clause and, therefore, subject to a standard community charge with a multiplier of two .

Some hon. Members have spoken to me about the matter. It is causing great anxiety because the implied level of taxation would be up to five times the existing rating levels for business premises. I am sure that that is not my hon. Friend's intention. It was made clear earlier that the Government's intention on business premises is to be broadly neutral and that they do not seek to increase the total sum that will be received under the Bill.

If the effect of the provision is as feared by that part of the holiday industry, I hope that my hon. Friend will undertake to look again at the matter."—[*Official Report*, Standing Committee E; 4 February 1988, c. 379.]

We are now considering that very question which was raised by the hon. Member. Has the Minister considered the serious matter that his hon. Friend referred to when we were discussing the matter in Committee in February 1988? Is an increase of £470 in one year justified?

It is disappointing. Proposals were made by members of the Standing Committee on both sides of the House—our discussions on caravans and chalets continued for some considerable time. The then Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) promised that the matter raised by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West would be examined. However, two and half years later, we are debating only half of the problem. When will we be back here again, having to put right further anomalies in this legislation, particularly standing charges?

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen, who was the Minister when the Bill was in Committee, suggested that local authorities would use the formula allowed in the Bill to regulate the amount of poll tax to be paid. It was then suggested that some local authorities would charge only half of the community charge on, or would even zero-rate, chalets with small rateable values. We have found that that is not the case, because local authorities are pressed to obtain income and resources.

That is why they have been charging double poll tax on caravans and chalets and that is why we are here—the legislation is not working. Unless we reconsider the rateable values of such properties—which is the basis for the proposals in the Bill—and for all holiday homes, we shall be in greater difficulties as time goes by.

This anomaly is a further example of how the legislation is mistaken. To use the words of the present Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), in a debate on the Local Government Finance Bill held in April 1988:

"as a priority we should reform rather than replace the rates."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 620.]

That is the way that we should approach this matter. He was explaining to the House that, in 1979, when he was a member of the Shadow Cabinet, it was not difficult to persuade his colleagues that reform of the rates was the only solution when considering the replacement of domestic rates. That is what we are doing tonight: we are reforming the rating system again.

This two-clause Bill dealing with the rating of caravans is a further demonstration that the Government have got it wrong again, and that the poll tax legislation must be amended. Far be it from me to say, "We told you so," but Conservative Members who read the Standing Committee debates will see that hon. Members on both sides pressed for caravans and chalets to be excluded from the standard poll tax charge.

We do not oppose the Bill, because we believe that the rateable value system is the best way to attract income from holiday caravans and chalets. Let me ask the Minister, however, whether he intends to include in the legislation provision for chalet holiday homes, which are in the same bracket as caravans.

10.30 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): My speech —which will be extremely brief—concerns an omission from the Bill. First, let me declare my interest as adviser to the British Marine Industries Federation.

In the other place, the Under-Secretary of State admitted that the Local Government Finance Act 1988 was deficient in relation to the rating of moorings. Exactly the same principle applies to caravans. It is a question of the unified business rate being applied to the whole of a marine—or, rather, the whole of a mooring site—rather than to each individual mooring.

I corresponded with the Government, pleading with them to include that minor point in the Bill. I am deeply sorry that they have not done so; I hope that the Minister will reassure us that he will do so at the earliest possible opportunity, and request that valuation officers consider it done when dealing with such matters "on the ground".

10.31 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I have considerable sympathy with the views of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin). I want to ask some technical questions, ranging a little more widely than his.

The fact that we are debating the Bill at all means that the Government know and accept that they have made a mistake; otherwise, there would be no need for it. I fear, however, that they are compounding their error. They made the original mistake for two reasons. We have heard the first again tonight, from both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). A caravan is not a chalet; it is a vehicle—a means of transport, like a boat. The 1988 Act confused residential sites, holiday sites and caravans that move from site to site, aand I am afraid that the Bill makes the same mistake. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, I do not want chalets to be included in the legislation. A chalet is a very different species; it is not a vehicle.

The second reason for the Government's mistake—which led to the flaws in the original legislation, to this Bill and to the flaws in it—is their wish to rush everything through. They would not allow hon. Members to make points such as this; they imposed guillotines, and rushed the legislation through the other place as well. Now they are in a mess.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): My right hon. Friend has stressed that a caravan is a vehicle; but it is illegal to travel in a moving caravan. I am not sure that I agree that chalets should be excluded.

Mr. Oakes: I do not agree entirely with my hon. Friend about that. He says that a caravan is not a vehicle; it is a motor home. One can both live and travel in a motor home. That rests on a pitch, just as a caravan rests on a pitch. This is a difficult problem. That is why the Government, their advisers and the draftsmen have got it wrong. They do not understand what a caravan is.

Mr. Wiggin: I hate to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, who is making a very good case. I am grateful for his support, but I must enlighten him by saying that, particularly in the case of boats, it is not a question of the boat; it is a question of the mooring and the site. That was the point that the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) was trying to make. Boats and moorings were completely dealt with in the Rates Act 1984. However, the Government omitted them from the 1988 legislation. All I ask is that they should be included.

Mr. Oakes: I am complaining not about the 1984 legislation but about the 1988 legislation that the Government tried to rush through the House.

[Mr. Oakes]

Why are we debating this Bill as if it were emergency legislation similar to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974? I realise that it is only a two-clause Bill, but why deal with all its stages in one night? It may be a minor matter that can be dealt with in that way. However, I submit that the Bill ought to be referred to a Second Reading Committee, where it could be properly debated. I fear that the Government will make the same mistake again; they do not recognise the difference between the pitch and the user of the pitch, be it for a boat or a caravan.

I recognise that, if someone lives permanently on a site in a caravan park, he or she ought to be subject to the community charge. I hate the community charge, but I understand the Government's logic. That is the main residence. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton said, the question is how often a holiday caravan is used: whether it remains on a certain pitch for, say, the summer and is then removed to the owner's garden.

What will be the position of the holiday caravan owner when it comes to non-domestic rating? The Government appear to be saying that they made an error by imposing the poll tax on holiday caravan owners, and that they are trying to put it right. I commend them for doing so. However, the Bill does not deal with the pitch and the occupant of the pitch.

I should declare an interest. I am a member of the council of the Caravan Club. It deals not with those who live in caravans but with those whose hobby, like mine, is to travel in caravans and have holidays in them. I declare that interest because we could be affected, in error, by the Bill. The Government do not want to hurt us, but I believe that they could.

The Caravan Club has a number of sites. Some of the sites are open all the year; most are open for only part of the year. Will the new legislation mean that they will be affected by the non-domestic rate, which, as the Minister said, will affect all other caravan sites? That is the least of the worries of the Caravan Club or of our sister club—it was once our rival, but in these days of glasnost and perestroika it is our sister club—the Caravan and Camping Club of Great Britain, which also has sites.

I am sorry to bore the House at this time of night, but this is important to us. Under the Caravan Sites Act 1968, caravans can use certificated locations. A certificated location is, for example, a farm, a pub or a vicarage, and it is allowed to take no more than five vans at any one time. Holiday vans can stay 21 or 30 days and must then move to another site. That enables someone to park a caravan or to pitch a tent.

That shows the difficulties in differentiating between caravans and tents. Some sites could be occupied by tents and some by caravans. The notes on clauses state that all other sites will be subject to non-domestic rates. Will a farmer or publican who allows his land to be used for £2 a night inadvertently find himself subject to non-domestic rates? If so, he will pack up and say, "I shall not pay non-domestic rates on this site."

Nearly a third of a million Caravan Club members and a considerable number of Caravan and Camping Club of Great Britain members use such sites for caravans and tents. Caravanning is the hobby of more than 750,000 people. If certificated locations have to pay non-domestic rates, they will pack up. Where will caravanners go? Every lay-by will be full of them, or they will have to give up their hobby. I do not think that that is the Government's intention, but I do not think they know what they are doing. That is their difficulty with the poll tax generally, but in the Bill they do not know what they are doing.

A farmer is allowed by legislation to permit someone to pitch a tent or park a caravan on his land for a certain number of days a year. He is even allowed to hold a rally of caravans and tents for a certain number of days a year. If all other sites are subject to non-domestic rates, he will not hold such rallies, and another source of pleasure for millions of people will be brought to an end by the legislation—not by design but be inadvertence.

Rather than having a debate at this late hour, a Second Reading Committee could have debated the Bill at length and in detail. I do not want to stay here and I am sure that neither do my hon. Friends. I am sure that the Minister does not want to stay here. I was a Minister for years and I know that he wants to get away and be done with the Bill as fast as he can. If he will give me an assurance that certificated locations—club sites and the sites of farmers who allow their land to be used for only a few days in the summer—will not be affected by the Bill or subject to non-domestic rates, I shall happily go home and let the Minister have his Bill in the knowledge that, at least on this tiny aspect of the poll tax, the Government have seen some sense.

10.44 pm

Mr. David Mudd (Falmouth and Camborne): I declare an interest as consultant to the British Holiday and Home Parks Association.

What I am about to say will probably give greater encouragement to the Opposition than to my hon. Friends. I welcome the Bill for two reasons. First, it shows yet again that the implications of the community charge legislation were so complex, and the decisions were reached so hastily, that the Department of the Environment and its Ministers did not appreciate everything that would come to pass. Secondly, I believe that the Bill proves yet again that the community charge legislation can be amended until that happy day when it is finally repealed.

When consultations were under way, before and during the passage of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, assurances were given to the holiday parks business that static leisure caravans would remain in rating and thus escape community charge. The owners, the industry, the park operators and the caravan manufacturers of Britain heaved a sigh of relief, because they realised that community charge liability in their sector would seriously undermine their future existence.

It seemed that all would be well until February this year, when the Department discovered to its discomfort that there were flaws in the legal interpretations on which it had based its reassurances. That was clearly a setback to its fulfilling its promise to keep static leisure caravans within rating.

It would be wrong at this stage to suggest that the Department should never have allowed itself to get into that position and, as the Bill is an attempt to remedy things, I will fight that temptation.

From February onwards, the Department went full speed astern to try to untangle the complex web in which it had entangled everybody, including itself. On 14 March this year—just two weeks before the implementation of the community charge—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who was then Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, told me:

"We take a serious view of this problem and we regret that it has emerged so late in the day."

The seriousness of the problem was immediately recognised by the community charge campaign mounted jointly by the National Caravan Council and the British Holiday and Home Parks Association. The BHHPA reckoned that, until the promised return to the status quo could be achieved, more than 50 per cent. of its members' parks would be adversely affected. The extra burden on the parks industry would be crippling. It would cost owners at least another £200 per pitch per annum. Even worse, it would be immensely unfair to the owners of leisure caravans if different regulations could apply to neighbouring parks within the same area depending on the nature of the site licence that had been granted.

Urgent talks were held between the joint committee and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), who was then the junior local government Minister. My hon. Friend revealed his anxiety to resolve the problem as well as his seeming lack of comprehension as to how so disruptive and complex a contradiction of Government promises and undertakings could have arisen.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): This is all very nostalgic. In Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill in 1988, these matters were dealt with in the greatest detail, and all the hazards to which the hon. Member is rightly referring were identified. It was the present Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Cope), and the present Secretary of State for Employment, then the Minister for Water and Planning, who, with the utmost arrogance, denied the possibility of any such problems arising. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this issue did not stand alone but was symptomatic of all the good objections to the poll tax which were raised then and which were brushed aside by arrogant individuals drunk on power but which are now coming home to roost?

Mr. Mudd: I feel that I have already been gracious enough to the Opposition without pursuing that line further—especially as I was about to pay tribute to the urgent action taken by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport when he realised that things were going wrong.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) was not a Member when the Scottish poll tax Bill received its Second Reading and entered Standing Committee. I can assure him that all these issues were raised in Committee on that Bill, and English Ministers have no excuse for getting it so drastically wrong.

Mr. Mudd: The hon. Gentleman has made what he believes to be a fair observation. I want to restore fairness by paying tribute to the speed and urgency with which my hon. Friend the Member for Itchen reacted when he realised that things were going wrong. Having acknowledged that on 14 March, he was able to announce by 30 March his decision to introduce legislation to amend matters and to deliver that which had been promised so long before.

I welcome the Bill, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can reassure me on one or two points. Clause 2 applies to Scotland and deletes existing provisions under section 15 of the Rating and Valuation (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1984. That obviously opens the door for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to introduce an order to enable caravan derating to be increased and extended to all static caravan holiday homes, including hire fleet units, retrospectively to 1 April 1990.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, I hope that he will confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will use his powers to enable the holiday parks business in Scotland to achieve urgent harmonisation and parity of value with England and Wales. Parity has not yet been achieved, and it is long overdue. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland intends to begin consultations on that important issue at some unspecified date. However, until confirmation of his intentions is given, the industry in Scotland will understandably feel and be extremely vulnerable.

In the meantime, I welcome a Bill that rectifies an administrative nightmare that should never have been allowed to arise in the first place. It eliminates community charge liability of between £300 and £500 for static holiday homes to a more acceptable level of between £90 and £120, in line with the uniform business rate. I welcome the Bill, as it will give a further boost to the amazingly successful caravan manufacturing industry in Britain, which can already meet 97 per cent. of the United Kingdom's demand for its products.

10.52 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Bill is yet another example of the mess and chaos that surround the poll tax and the measures by which the Government introduced it. The Bill is another criticism of the guillotine procedure used to carry through the legislation.

The Bill is based on the failure to understand what happens on caravan sites, most of which are a mixture of holiday and residential caravans. The furnished lettings and the tourist area have been affected by the mess and chaos. The holiday home and caravan industry has been affected, as has the bed and breakfast community. In the tourist industry—this is true of the caravan industry and the bed-and-breakfast community—people need to know by this time of the year what they will do next year. The bed-and-breakfast people, who normally advertise by this time of the year, still do not know how they will be affected by the rating and community charge system next summer. They therefore cannot advertise their services for next year.

Similar confusion has occurred with furnished lettings, since some community charge registration officers are treating the letting of a small number of furnished rooms as creating an additional standard charge in a property that will last in perpetuity. Someone who decides to let two

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

or three rooms for a short period has incurred, for the rest of his tenure of that property, a standard charge that he cannot extinguish when he ceases to let those rooms.

There have been similar problems with arrangements for service families and personnel. No doubt we shall have a succession of Bills of this kind if the Government are at all serious, even about the limited anomalies of the poll tax, let alone its fundamental weaknesses. Therefore, it is important that we get it right in this instance. Hon. Members who have mentioned specific difficulties will be at some disadvantage with the compressed procedures that we are likely to use to deal with the Bill.

I have tabled amendments, but they deal only with the points that I have identified, and other hon. Members did not have much time in which to table amendments. Indeed, on Thursday it was announced that we would not go through the remaining stages today, and amendments had to be tabled hastily when that decision was changed. I am grateful to the Chair for selecting amendments that had to be tabled on Friday, which was the first time that it was confirmed that the Bill would go through all its stages today.

This whole affair has presented serious problems for local authorities. Community charge officers did not know what to send out. Even a promise by the Government that they will legislate is not a sound basis on which to tax people. The normal procedure on which people are taxed is based on the law on the statute book, not vague promises that legislation might be brought in, delayed, amended, or might not come out in the form now proposed.

As it turns out, the Bill, which I welcome for what it does, is nevertheless a problem for several local authorities. I do not know how other hon. Members are affected, but Berwick borough council, for example, will lose £330,000 in revenue as a result of the change. I am talking about a small local authority—only about 26,000 people—and £16 in every individual's community charge.

The local authority, anticipating that difficulty, wrote to the Department indicating that there should be some form of compensation, whether directly or by way of some reassessment of the basis on which grant is paid to the local authority. The Department said that that will not be necessary, because it will all be evened out through the business rate to which caravans will be subject.

Of course, the business rate is not allocated on the same principle. The proceeds of business rate are allocated according to a population formula for the area, and the benefit that each charge payer in my constituency will get will be quite small. The Minister may care to give some estimate of what it is—the total additional revenue from caravan sites divided by the total number of people who provide the basis of the formula for redistributing the business rate. I imagine that it will be a relatively small amount—perhaps a pound or two per person—but at £16 per charge payer, which will be the burden on Berwick borough charge payers as a result of the change, will therefore obviously affect their poll tax level.

The issues that I wish to explore further by way of amendment particularly concern, for example, those people who have no home other than a caravan on a caravan site and are accepted as such by the community charge registration officer who has registered them for personal community charge but who are treated by the site owners as not being permanent residents.

Ministers need to understand what happens on caravan sites. There are probably quite a few caravan sites on which there are more people living permanently than the site licences permit. That is not an unusual state of affairs, either because the site operators have not stuck closely to the original planning permission or to their site licences, because tenants have not been entirely clear about their intentions, or because tenants did not get a clear idea of what they were permitted to do when they originally bought a caravan at a certain site and may have been led to expect that they could stay there all the year round.

That produces a situation in which the site owner's view about who is a permanent resident is not necessarily the same as the community charge officer's view. I shall deal with the sort of argument that that leads to when we consider the amendments.

I am concerned also—it is the subject of another amendment—about how tenants are to know their proper rate liability for caravans. The Minister will no doubt help on that matter in Committee. It is important that we get the details right and that Ministers also understand the severe impact that the legislation will have on some local authorities with large numbers of caravans. That impact should be taken into account when Ministers assess the financial circumstances of those authorities.

10.59 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I declare an interest. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Mudd), I am an adviser to the British Holiday and Home Parks Association, which is not surprising, considering the number of home parks in my constituency.

I welcome the Bill, which is important and necessary. I welcome also my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) back to the Front Bench. I am confident that, with him looking after the Scottish end of these matters, and he and I collaborating, we shall achieve the same result that we have recently achieved on other matters that are controversial in Scotland.

Mr. Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman mean the destruction and division in the Scottish Conservative party?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should worry about his leadership problems and leave us to enjoy the delights of now having a stable relationship in the party, throughout Scotland and elsewhere.

My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will not be surprised to learn that, down the years, I have had to deal with rating anomalies in many different forms. I have tabled private Member's legislation dealing with matters affecting caravan sites and caravans in Scotland because of the anomalies which, I am sorry to say, still exist in terms of valuations and other factors affecting us relative to the rest of the United Kingdom, and especially England and Wales.

We in Scotland are concerned that the consultations take on board the genuine fears of the Scottish site owners, who vividly remember how they were disadvantaged in the past. It was the efforts made by myself and others that levelled the playing field. My right hon. and hon. Friends

will also remember that during the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, which brought about the introduction of the community charge in Scotland, we debated those matters extensively and fully.

Fortunately for us, we thought that we had fully resolved the problems then, but it appears not. That comes as no surprise to me, because I have always believed that any form of local taxation charges—or, indeed, any taxation—must constantly be open to amendment. That is the very nature of taxation. I am astonished that any Opposition Member should think that there is something odd about introducing such amendments. I remember spending nearly all my time on amendments to the rates, which had been in existence for a long time.

Therefore, I welcome the Bill and look forward to the discussions and consultations. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood will note that and that it will be me, among others, with whom he will be discussing the matter.

11.2 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): First, I declare an interest: I own a caravan on a site in the most beautiful part of north Yorkshire.

One problem that caravan owners face—I include all those on the same site as myself—is the fact that, over the past 12 months, there has been complete confusion about the payments. The owner of the site on which my caravan is located asked me to pay £85. I paid that sum, but in a letter the owner said that he was not sure whether the amount was accurate. I take his word for that, because he is an honest man who runs a good caravan site. As I said, it is in north Yorkshire. It is huge and very popular, and provides accommodation for day visitors, touring caravans, tents, chalets and fixed caravans such as mine, which is static and about 28 ft long. It cannot be moved without a trailer. There is therefore a mix of all types of holiday accommodation. The important aspect in terms of the Bill is that the site is open only on a seasonal basis, from March to October, so everyone is confined to that summer period, except for the people who work on the site, who are permanent residents in the chalets.

People can go for two days if they wish and those who, like me are on low incomes, can go for two weeks. Other people are free to spend virtually the whole season there —14, 15, 16 or 20 weeks. I am limited by my commitments to the House. Such flexibility should exist, and I am happy to pay my contribution for the caravan services provided on the site.

This year, several people with caravans on that site—my neighbours—decided that they would move. They decided to do so not because of the ground rent which, it is accepted, increases year by year because of the site improvements, but because they are unaware of and uncertain about the charges for the uniform business rate and the community charge. Therefore, caravan owners are disposing of their caravans and losing money on them. They are not getting the going rate, because people will not buy them when they are also uncertain about the community charge.

I am delighted that legislation is coming forward now, but it should have happened at least 12 months ago.

Mr. O'Brien: I am following my hon. Friend's speech closely. He said that the site covered a complex of holiday homes. One would assume—perhaps my hon. Friend can explain—that planning permission for the site was for holiday homes, so the site is a commercial undertaking. Therefore, it should be embraced within the legislation as a commercial undertaking and the homes on the site should come under commercial rating, not poll tax rating.

Mr. Thompson: I agree with my hon. Friend. The site contains chalets that are occupied by some of its permanent employees for 12 months of the year. It is a huge site in North Yorkshire called Flamingo park. Other chalets and static caravans such as mine are temporarily occupied during the summer season. Touring caravans come on to the site for a few weeks and tents are pitched on the site for one or two weeks. There is a range of holiday facilities on that site. It is a commercial operation that should be based on the uniform business rate, without the present uncertainty.

Some of my friends who own caravans on the site are now saying that they will have to dispose of their caravans because they do not know what it will cost to keep them there next year and they are worried that they will not be able to afford the cost. People who use static caravans generally borrow £4,000 or £5,000 to buy them, and are running at the limit of their holiday budget. They are not people on high incomes who can buy or sell at a whim and dispose of the caravans as they wish. It is their only holiday facility, which they are now losing.

The problem has existed for 12 months and has now been aggravated, so that not only is the site owner having problems because sites are unoccupied, but people are trying to dispose of caravans that they cannot sell. The uncertainty means that people will not buy them. I know about only that one site, but the same problems must be occurring throughout the country. It is sad that the legislation, welcome as it is, is at least 12 months too late.

11.9 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I have no interest to declare. Many of my constituents are the sort of people whom the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) has just described. A year ago they thought that their position was plain; now uncertainty has crept in, and we should pay tribute to Government and Opposition spokesmen for giving the House an opportunity to make the position clear as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) raised a couple of interesting points, but I hope that they will not hold up the uncertainty of the greatest number.

I have been re-reading a biography of the great A. P. Herbert. If he were still here he would ask about houseboats, which are sometimes moored, sometimes used for boating and sometimes can be pulled up on to dry land. That might interest my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), who spoke about the interests of people with boats.

I just hope that the Minister will not have to send one of his civil servants down to St. Helens in the Isle of Wight to go around the edge of Bembridge to see all those empty motor torpedo boats, sometimes on stilts, sometimes not, to determine their liability to the rating system when it comes. I hope that we can get the legislation through so that matters will be sorted out for many ordinary holiday makers, who will then be able to plan for the future.

11.12 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It is worth noting that caravans were dealt with at great length in the Committee examining the local government legislation—some of my hon. Friends spent two days discussing it. When the great about-turn in the Conservative party comes, it will be interesting to go into the details of the names and constituencies of the Tory Members who sat on that Committee and nodded through every dot and comma of the legislation without listening to the objections which have been voiced tonight and will be voiced on future occasions.

We are in an interregnum. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) has been put into the job as a leading light of the No Turning Back group—and the St. Andrews set—to argue in support of the poll tax and all its works, as if it were a glorious enterprise to be defended to the last. It is hilarious to see the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) alongside him in the Government. No one in the whole of Scotland, from Muckle Flugga to Machrihanish has been more unstinting in his defence of every aspect of the poll tax and its corollary, the standard community charge. I wonder what this squad will do in a few weeks' or months' time when they are told, in the immortal words of Mr. Ron Ziegler, then President Nixon's press secretary, that all previous statements are inoperable, and that the whole tax is and always has been a load of rubbish.

A new anomaly has been created tonight. Of course I welcome the fact that caravans are to be taken out of the standard community charge. No one but an idiot would have included them in the first place; the fact that they are included speaks for itself. The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) was mentioned earlier, but I shall not labour that point.

It is all very well that caravans are to be taken out of the charge, but some caravan second homes are handsome dwellings, in which a lot of money, labour and love have been invested. Some people, as a hobby, have devoted a great deal of time, effort and energy to turning them into little palaces, and I wish them well. I do not believe for a moment that these homes should be subjected to the idiocy of the standard community charge; but what is the logic of excluding second-home caravans that may be worth £15,000—for a good one—but continuing to impose the full majesty of the standard community charge on people on low incomes with, say, tiny flats in a coastal resort—flats that may be worth £2,000 or £3,000, with rateable values of £70 or £80?

Where is the logic in that? That question is rhetorical, because there is no logic. If it is possible for a caravan or a house to be a first home, then logically it is possible for a caravan or a house to be a second home.

I am not arguing against the concession that has been belatedly won for caravan owners. Anyone can see the absence of logic in imposing the standard community charge on a property that is part of a block of flats and which may have a tiny value and perhaps far fewer amenities than a caravan. I shall not labour the point, because it is self-evident. Sticking plaster is being applied all over the place. The Government have had to retreat because of the efforts of a pressure group and thousands of people on caravan sites. No doubt the Government will make a virtue of seeing the light three years after everyone else saw it. What about the small flat with a value much lower than that of many a caravan? There will be no answer to that question.

The pernicious evil of the poll tax is perhaps seen as well in its close cousin, the standard community charge. The one thing that the poll tax cannot afford to allow in its name is any principle of ability to pay. That applies to the person of immense wealth and to the person of modest means, who both have to pay the same. Similarly, whether the second home is a castle or a tiny flat in my constituency with an outside toilet, the tenants of both must pay the same. That is the logic of the poll tax and the standard community charge.

In my constituency, and especially in the resort of Millport, where there is a tradition of hundreds of tiny flats, elderly people and those who have put their life savings, sometimes pittances, into small second homes have been forced to sell because rates bills of £70 or £80 have become standard community charges of £500 to £600. Those people have been forced to get rid of their tiny second homes in the same way as some people have had to get rid of caravans which were their pride and joy. My hon. Friends have spoken about that. Such damage has already been done by the people who imposed this madness on the country over the past two or three years.

What do the Government intend to do about the standard community charge as a whole, not just as it applies to caravans? They do not know, and neither do I, but in due course they will take their orders from the new Secretary of State for the Environment. When that happens, the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will become a member of the Rapidly Turning Back group. If he wants to hang on to his job, he will have to admit that everything that he has been defending, even in this debate, about the principle of the standard community charge has all along been a fraud.

We must not underestimate the human damage that has already been done by the maniacs who imposed this nonsense upon the country. That is nowhere more evident than in the workings of the standard community charge. We are anxious to exempt caravan dwellers and people who use them at weekends, and we therefore support the measure. Nobody should see the measure as a concession or as a sign of enlightenment. It is years late and it is a tiny concession on an issue that has been pointed out all along. It was made plain during the passage of Scottish legislation and during the passage of a Local Government Finance Bill that affected England and Wales. If the Minister has anything to say apart from engaging in a holding operation until someone tells him which way he is to jump and whether he may have to sacrifice his ideological background to hang on to his job, let him tell us his views on the principle of the standard community charge.

11.20 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am glad that Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities is to reply to the debate. When I last asked him to answer a question and to take a certain course of action, he was most obliging. I appreciated his response when he saved the Carlisle-Settle railway line.

I suspect that he will find it much easier to respond to my request this evening. I merely ask him to treat holiday chalets and caravans in the same way. A great deal of distress and annoyance has been caused to many of my

constituents who own caravans or chalets on the Solway coast. Many of the chalets are not worth £15,000 or £10,000, which are the values of some caravans. Many of them were built after the war, when soldiers received their demob money. Small communities would be formed on a field, with no water and no electricity. Each chalet is now worth only a few hundred pounds. Many of the chalets have been in the ownership of the same family for two generations.

Unfortunately, the Government have made it impossible for many families to keep their chalets. As they are worth only a few hundred pounds, they are not being sold on. Instead, they are being knocked down. That is a crime. Constituents asked me whether I could help, and I wrote to some of the Minister's predecessors. He has had so many that I have rather lost track. I wrote to a Minister on 27 May, and received a response on 27 July. It included an apology for the long delay but offered no solace to my constituents.

It makes no sense that chalets, which come within the terms of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, are classed differently from caravans. In the old days, local authorities used to say, in effect, "Yes, you have a caravan, so you must pay to have your dustbin emptied." They never classed them as residences then, although that would have meant extra income. It was stated in the letter of 27 July that the Minister has discretion.

Allerdale district council is controlled by the Conservative party and a few independents. It did not realise what it was doing when it set a standard rate of £298 for caravans. In lengthy correspondence, I have asked whether it will give an indication to those who own chalets what the poll tax will be next year.

The most recent letter that I received from chairman of the council, Mr. Conaway, which was in July, told me that the matter would go before the appropriate committee in October, when a decision would be taken. I telephoned the council at the end of November and was told that no decision had yet been taken that would bear on the chalets. That is an example of the Government leaving a local authority with discretion. I am not a Member who thinks that we in this place know better and that we should take decision-making from local authorities, and the Bill will remove discretion from the remit of local authorities.

The chalets that I am talking about are closed for four months of the year, so the poll tax charge that is levied on them is much higher per month of use than that on the property of someone who is a resident within the area that is covered by Allerdale district council. I am saying that chalets should be treated in the same way as caravans. They come within the legislation that applies to caravans, and they are cheaper than caravans. They do not have the excellent facilities that are available in some caravans.

I declare an interest, because I own a caravan. It is not an especially salubrious one, but it enables me to get away from this madhouse from time to time. It is great value for money. Why should I pay less for my summer caravan on the Solway coast than my neighbour pays for his chalet, which is worth less than my caravan? There is no sense in that. There is no sense in the poll tax.

The Government should today introduce a Bill to abolish the poll tax, not just for caravans and chalets but for everybody, and revert to the old rating system. They could then go to the electorate. Instead, they will tease them for a couple of years and say, "After the next election we will do something about the poll tax." I doubt whether the Minister will agree to do anything about chalets, and I doubt whether the Conservative party will ever do anything other than tinker with the poll tax.

11.25 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): As this Bill applies to Scotland, I should like to say a few words—*[Interruption.]* I assure Conservative Members that it will be only a few words.

In the Scottish newspapers yesterday, there was considerable coverage of what may have been an inspired leak from the new Secretary of State for the Environment—that his preference was for the abolition of the poll tax and a return to a rating system based upon the sale value of a house—*[Laughter.]* I do not understand why the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), is laughing. I am aware of the difficult position that he and others of his hon. Friends will be in when that happens.

We accept the Bill, which is a minor amendment to the poll tax. It should have been brought forward very much earlier. It does not remove the basic unfairnesses of the standard poll tax, which have been evident since its inception and which we raised both in the House and in Committee. For example, Her Majesty the Queen pays two standard community charges on Balmoral, while constituents in a small flat in Millport pay more than the Queen because they happen to be in a higher rated authority.

That is the basic unfairness of the standard community charge, which we have reiterated time and again, and now do so once more. Although we welcome the Bill, we look forward to the day when, bit by bit—as is happening with this Bill—properties are returned to the old rating system. I am sure that, eventually, all Conservative Members will come to the view that the rating system was not so bad after all.

I wish to question the financial effects of the Bill and its effect on public service manpower. The Bill provides:

"The Bill will reduce authorities' income from standard community charges in both England and Wales and Scotland. In England and Wales the non-domestic rates payable to the Secretary of State will increase and thus the amount distributable by him to charging authorities."

Of course, it is not made clear that that amount will be considerably less than the amount that the local authorities will have paid. Who will make up the difference? The Bill then states:

"In Scotland the non-domestic rates payable to local authorities will increase"—

but the amount of money being paid will be considerably reduced—

"but they are required to repay half of the standard community charges paid in respect of caravans in respect of 1989-90."

Again, who will pick up the bill for that?

Ministers, especially the hon. Member for Eastwood, know that Scottish local authorities are already in dire financial difficulties because of the consequences of the poll tax. The simple fact is that 80 per cent. of those who have not paid their poll tax cannot afford to pay it. Regional authorities such as Strathclyde and district authorities such as Glasgow are facing enormous shortfalls. They are having to pay off staff, cut services and so on. The Bill may be minor, but it adds one more problem to those being faced by Scottish local authorities—unless the Minister gives a guarantee that central Government will make up

[Mr. John Maxton]

the difference. It does not say that in the financial memorandum, and I hope that the Minister will not try to imply that. The Government must make up that difference and not put another financial burden on local authorities.

11.29 pm

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) described me a member of the St. Andrews set, which I am not. I hope that he will not mind if, none the less, I answer the points made about Scotland as well as those about England and Wales.

As to the question asked by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), when assessing the amount of the settlement that we make on local authorities, we do not take into account the income that they may have from standard charges, which is a bonus to them.

The hon. Member for Cathcart will recall that, in Scotland, static leisure caravans have remained in rating except when they are used as someone's sole or main residence. From 1 April 1989, when domestic rates were abolished in Scotland, residential caravans have either housed personal community charge payers or have been subject to the standard community charge where no one was solely or mainly resident in the caravans. There are only about 600 caravans in Scotland giving rise at any one time to the standard community charge, which means that the impact of the provisions will be minimal in terms of community charge income.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Mudd) asked about the derating of caravans in Scotland. To enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to take action to deal with the lack of harmonisation in caravan values in the 1990 revaluation, as a result of which Scottish values are much higher than for comparable caravans and pitches in England and Wales, he proposes to exercise his existing regulation making powers to increase the current 40 per cent. derating enjoyed by static leisure caravans, and to extend it to all caravans.

To enable that to be done, it will be necessary to repeal the existing provision that provides for the derating of only certain caravans. The Bill repeals that provision with effect from 1 April 1990. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is currently collecting information on the extent of the discrepancy between the rateable values of caravans and caravan parks in Scotland and England and Wales. Until that information, and that provided by the caravan industry itself, has been analysed, my right hon. Friend will not be able to determine the level of derating necessary to achieve harmonisation. I am sure that both my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), who has championed the cause of caravan owners and site owners in the past, will want to participate in the consultation process.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) both welcomed the Bill, and want an end to uncertainty. That is what the Bill sets out to achieve. The hon. Member for Wansbeck was particularly concerned about multi-sites. Multi-use sites containing holiday caravan pitches, touring pitches, and pitches for tents and for chalets that are let out for short periods of the kind that my hon. Friend mentioned will be subject to non-domestic rates, except to the extent that they contain accommodation used as a sole or main residence. If they are used for only part of the year, rateable value should of course reflect that.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) expressed concern about the decision taken by Berwick local authority to set its community charge in the expectation of there being standard community charge income. It is up to Berwick what view it takes, but it was always our intention to exclude caravans from the standard community charge, except where they were a sole or main residence—and I think that was made clear.

If the authority takes account of standard community charge income this year, it will have set a lower charge than it would otherwise have done. The local authority's charge payers would have benefited from that situation. At the end of the year, the authority will presumably find itself with a shortfall on the collection fund, so next year's charge will need to be higher to compensate. However, the benefit has been there for charge payers this year, when a lower charge was set because more income was anticipated. Therefore, the question of Government compensation does not arise.

The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) was concerned about touring sites. The sort of touring site that he was talking about may well have been liable to rates under the old rating system. If the use was limited to a few days a year, the rateable value would have been very low. Indeed, in many cases, where the use was casual and irregular, the site might not have been assessed at all if there were no permanent pitches.

Under the existing rating system, the position is the same. The Bill does not touch on sites of that kind, but relates only to protected sites—those containing one or more caravans which are licensed for year-round occupation. I hope that that is reassuring to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) mentioned a different point—moorings for boats. I reiterate that we accept that there is a case for replicating in the new system the provisions of the Rates Act 1984 for the valuation officer to group together moorings as a single hereditament and give them a single value. There are good administrative reasons for adopting that approach. Where I part company with my hon. Friend is that I do not believe that the lack of that provision has led to the unfair treatment of any ratepayer, although I shall be interested to hear from my hon. Friend about any evidence to the contrary.

Having said that I do not think that any ratepayer has suffered, I repeat that we intend to make the change which he wants when there is a suitable opportunity, and I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that, although he feels strongly about the matter, it is a less urgent point than the question of caravans, as many holiday caravan owners are potentially subject to far higher charges than we had intended.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), among others, mentioned chalets. Chalets are domestic and are therefore potentially liable to the standard community charge if they provide living accommodation, provided that the occupier has a sufficient interest in the chalet for the charge to be applicable. If the chalet is used for short-stay accommodation, and is let in such a way for more than 140 days a year, it will be non-domestic and will be liable to rates. Some chalets may be neither living

accommodation nor let for short periods. They would be liable neither to the standard charge nor to rates. If a chalet is subject to the standard charge but is also subject to a planning restriction limiting its use to part of the year only, a maximum standard charge multiplier of one applies.

Leaving all those important categories to one side, chalets which provide living accommodation are potentially liable to the standard charge and are akin to second homes, and it is reasonable that they should be treated accordingly.

Mr. O'Brien: The chalets at Skipsea that I referred to have no running water and no toilet facilities. They are simply places that someone can use for recreation, for limited periods of the year. How can the Minister describe them as domestic properties when they are as basic as a shelter? People have to provide their own chemical toilet and to obtain their own water. There are few facilities such as street lighting and main roads. Refuse is collected occasionally.

Mr. Portillo: It is not for me but for the valuation officer to say whether or not they are domestic properties. The hon. Gentleman does not necessarily have a good point when he mentions the non-provision of water, as that is not a local authority service paid for under the personal community charge, let alone under the standard community charge. If the accommodation is not domestic, it will not fall within the community charge, either standard or personal.

Mr. O'Brien: That is what I meant by asking for a definition of a domestic property. If there are no facilities such as running water or toilets in the property, how can they be described as domestic properties?

Mr. Portillo: I repeat that that is a matter for the valuation officers. However, a house with no running water is not necessarily uninhabitable: it cannot be ruled out of the domestic sector. The hon. Gentleman is using a piece of litmus paper which may not constitute the only appropriate test.

Mr. Martlew: Let us suppose that a chalet and a caravan are next to each other, under exactly the same conditions, on a site that is closed for four or five months of the year. How can the Minister say that one is subject to a standard rate, while the other will be subject to the new system? That does not make sense. It is entirely unfair, and the Minister should do something about it tonight.

Mr. Portillo: Let me return to something that I wanted to say to the hon. Member for Normanton. He quoted my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), implying that my hon. Friend had said that he would produce legislation covering chalets as well as caravans. May I remind the hon. Gentleman of what my hon. Friend said in Committee on 25 February 1988—and, in so doing, reply to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)? He said:

"We have reconsidered the issue thoroughly and conclude that there is a sound a logical case for drawing a distinction between movable caravans, which are chattels and depreciating assets, and other second homes that are not movable. Although the generality of second homes must be treated as domestic properties, and it is only fair and proper that their owners or lessees should pay the standard charge, it is more appropriate for caravan sites and pitches to remain in non-domestic rating."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 25 February 1988; c. 1031.]

I reiterate what was said then: a caravan is a chattel, and is not in itself subject to rating. It is the pitch on which it stands that is rateable, because it is non-domestic property. Like other rateable property, it is assessed on its notional annual rental value. The presence of a caravan on a pitch will contribute to its value. A chalet, on the other hand, is domestic property if it is living accommodation, and whether it is living accommodation is a question for the valuation officer to determine in each case.

Mr. Wilson: With all due respect, this is absurd. According to the explanatory and financial memorandum, clause 2 will, in relation to Scotland,

"exclude caravans from the definition of 'domestic subjects'."

The Bill creates the differential between domestic subjects and caravans which are not to be domestic subjects.

The Minister has repeated the immortal prose of the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). How can he defend the logic of excluding a caravan worth £15,000 while including a chalet or flat worth £2,000?

Mr. Portillo: We do not seem to be able to shake the Opposition's belief that property values should be the universal determinant, but that is not the principle involved in the community charge.

The hon. Gentleman wants to know why second-home-owners who have caravans rather than cottages or flats escape the standard charge. The law as it stands attempts to make the distinction that he is trying to make, but it simply does not work. We have found no satisfactory alternative break point between holiday caravans and second homes. Rather than create a further set of problems—and because so few caravan second homes exist—we have decided not to make that distinction. We believe that there are only about 2,000 such caravans. The number is restricted by the limited supply; hence the high value of the pitches that are licensed for all-year occupation. There is a strong financial incentive to use such pitches for residential purposes.

I believe that the problem identified by the hon. Gentleman, although it may give him some heartache, is of limited application. The Government have tried to apply his preferred remedy, but have found that it does not work.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the Minister for allowing me to intervene again. If the issue of holiday homes and part-time holiday homes is not resolved tonight, I foresee that in a few months we shall have to deal with another Bill to amend what we are amending tonight in this Bill.

I remind the Minister that, in columns 427 to 430 of the *Official Report* of the proceedings in Standing Committee on 4 February 1988, it was said that the question of the boundaries between domestic and non-domestic property, on which now depends liability as between the community charge and rating, has not proved simple to resolve. The House of Commons Library research note states that the discussion in section C of the background paper should be referred to. Is the Minister saying that the division between domestic and non-domestic properties is a matter for the valuation officers and that it is their responsibility? If disputes arise, who will resolve them? Will it be possible to deal with them here, or will the Minister provide for a decision to be reached if there is a dispute over what are and what are not domestic properties?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that whatever laws we pass they have to be interpreted outside Parliament. We can draft general laws, but how they apply to different people and circumstances and, in this case, to different properties must be a matter of judgment, whether by the courts or by officers who are delegated to take the decision.

The hon. Gentleman implies that borderline problems arise uniquely under the community charge legislation. That is not so. There are difficult borderline cases in every taxation system. The best way to resolve them is to leave the decision to the valuation officers. If the parties are aggrieved, they can use the appeals procedure, or they can test the matter in the courts. That is the only way in which people out there can test what the laws mean that Parliament has passed and how they apply to different people in different circumstances.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to order [29 November].

CARAVANS (STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGE AND RATING) BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

CARAVANS (STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGE AND RATING) BILL

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill may make provision with respect to the liability to non-domestic rates in respect of pitches for caravans.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Bill

Bill considered in Committee, pursuant to order [29 November.]

[SIR PAUL DEAN *in the Chair.*]

Clause 1

CARAVANS IN ENGLAND AND WALES: STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGES AND NON-DOMESTIC RATES

11.47 pm

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 21, at end insert—

'(7A) It shall be an offence for a caravan site owner, or any person acting on behalf of a site owner, deliberately to misrepresent to any site tenant the extent of that tenant's liability to non-domestic rates.'.

This rather hastily drafted amendment is designed to extract from the Minister an explanation of how tenants can have confidence in the apportionment that is made of the rates on a site as a whole. Bearing in mind the possibilities for misunderstanding, not to say tension and disagreement, which can arise on caravan sites, it is important to establish that tenants will not have to face an unchallengeable assertion by a site owner that that is their rates liability at a time when they may suspect that the total amount being collected from tenants exceeds the rates burden placed on the site as a whole and that the amount allocated to them does not fairly represent their share of the total burden. That causes tenants on site considerable anxiety. I hope that the Minister can clarify the position.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I thank the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for the constructive way in which he spoke to the amendment. I share his concern that caravan owners should be protected from the attempts of site owners to pass on to them excessive charges under the guise of rates liability. As I shall explain, existing provisions should meet his concern.

For many years, it has been standard practice for a caravan site to be assessed for rating as a single entity, with liability falling on the site operator, rather than making a separate assessment of each caravan, with liability falling on the owner. The Non-Domestic Rating (Caravan Sites) Regulations 1990, which we shall extend to cover all caravan sites in non-domestic rating following the passage of the Bill, carry forward that practice into the new rating system. Whether the site owner can pass on an appropriate proportion of his rates bill to the owners of the caravans on site will depend on the terms of his agreement with them.

In making the new regulations, we took care to preserve an important safeguard of the caravan owner's interests. The regulations provide that when the valuation officer enters the value of a caravan site in the rating list, he must also, within a month, inform the site operator in writing of the number of caravans occupied by persons other than the site operator that are included in the assessment and what value is attributed to those caravans. The regulations

also provide that any of the caravan owners may, without charge, inspect a copy of the statement giving the information held by the valuation officer.

That means that the individual caravan owner can find out what the average rateable value of a non-residential caravan on the site is and what its rates liability would be were he to pay the rates himself. When the site owner asks for a contribution to rates, he will know what he should be paying, and if the amount seems excessive he can challenge it.

Those who occupy mobile homes as their sole or main residence and pay the personal community charge at that address are not liable for non-domestic rates. They may be required to contribute to the rates for any communal facilities on site that they use, but that would depend on the terms of their agreement with the site owner. It would be unusual for a site operator to attempt to pass on to mobile home residents any part of the non-domestic rate liability that derives from holiday caravans on the same site. Again, that would be governed by the agreement with the site operator.

The agreement that a residential or non-residential caravan owner has with the site operator is a legally enforceable contract. If it follows the format of the standard agreement issued by the trade association, which is widely used, it will contain a condition regarding the payment of rates, and if the site operator attempts to demand a charge for rates that the caravan owner knows to be improper or excessive he will be in breach of that agreement.

Civil law already provides proper remedies for such breaches of contract and I do not think that we need to make provision for a criminal offence further to the offence of obtaining property by deception, which is already contained in the Theft Act 1968. A deliberate misrepresentation of the amount payable in rates under such a model agreement could constitute an offence under section 15 of that Act.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied with that explanation and will not wish to press his amendment.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation, which goes some way to meeting my concern. I remain anxious about when a caravan owner challenges an apportionment, using as his basis the average for the site as a whole. He has been shrewd, has obtained the average for the site and says, "Why are you asking so much from me?" He is in a relatively weak position. If the agreement covers the point and is of the form described by the Minister, he could take the site owner to court for a breach of it, but I am aware of many tenants who have been unable to obtain a copy of their site agreement.

Let us suppose that the tenant has a copy. He must consider whether, as an owner of a caravan on a pretty low income, to take a large, perhaps multi-site owner, to court on a difficult point of law. I cannot think of many caravan owners who would consider themselves in a position to do that. I submit to the Minister that tenants are in rather a weak position when it comes to defending their rights and could well find themselves landed with unreasonable levels of charge, with no adequate means of enforcement.

I know that the creation of new criminal offences is not an activity in which one wishes readily to indulge. The law is complicated enough as it is. Nevertheless, I ask the Minister to consider the matter carefully in the light of the slightly changed circumstances that will result from the Bill, to assess whether there is adequate protection for tenants. It is reasonable that tenants should look to the Government, as the authors of the system as a whole—whatever criticisms we may have of it—to ensure that it is not abused so that it becomes even more burdensome because unreasonable sums are charged without adequate recourse. I ask the Minister to examine carefully how the provisions work.

As it appears that the Minister is willing to do that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 21, at end insert—

'(7B) No person who has registered for a personal community charge in respect of their residence in a caravan shall be liable to make any contribution to non-domestic rates in respect of the same caravan, at the same site, in the same year.'.

This amendment deals with a more complex matter, which is very important to those who are affected. It is designed to ensure that nobody who has paid a personal community charge or has been registered as liable for one shall be rendered liable to pay non-domestic rates in respect of the same caravan.

I have found it necessary to table the amendment because of the confusion—which I described earlier—on sites as to who is and who is not permitted to be a permanent resident having no other home. Circumstances can arise—they have certainly arisen in my constituency—in which there are more people on a caravan site whose only home is a caravan or a mobile home than the site operators licence permits or than the site operator is prepared to admit.

Such circumstances may arise for a number of reasons. A site operator may have taken on more permanent residents than his licence permits or it may have been unclear, when someone bought a caravan or mobile home, whether he was allowed to be a permanent resident. For whatever reason, a site owner may not wish to treat a caravan resident or group of caravan residents as a permanent resident or residents with no other home and may wish to ignore the view of the community charge officer that that is what they are.

A specific case has arisen, affecting a number of tenants at the Haggerston Castle holiday park outside Berwick-upon-Tweed. A notice issued by Bourne Leisure Group Ltd., which uses that caravan park, said:

"Holiday caravans on holiday caravan parks are controlled by the relevant planning permission and their Site Licence to be used for holidays and recreational purposes only and therefore, no registration of a holiday caravan for the Community Charge (Poll Tax) is permissible . . . . Accordingly, any registration for the Community Charge of a caravan on a holiday caravan park will be a breach of this agreement and the caravan will be disconnected and have to leave the park."

That represented a direct threat from the site owners to the tenants, saying that, if any tenant who registers—as he is legally obliged to register—the fact that he has no other permanent home, his caravan will be disconnected and removed from the park. It is a direct threat to someone carrying out a legal obligation to identify his permanent home.

I wrote to the then Minister about this issue, and he replied:

"Even though the terms of Haggerston Castle's site licence may be restricted to holiday and recreational purposes"—

which, incidentally, they are not entirely—

[Mr. Beith]

"where a person considers that he might nonetheless be subject to a charge he must comply with the community charge regulations. For the purposes of the personal community charge, the status of the caravan—whether or not it counts as domestic property—is irrelevant; what is at issue is whether the person is solely or mainly resident in that place. It would be more appropriate for Haggerston Castle to frame its notice in the terms of what use of their caravans is acceptable under the terms of the agreement with the individual, rather than to suggest that a person may not inform the local authority if he thinks he subject to the charge."

Naturally I drew the attention of the tenants and the site operators to the Minister's views, but that was not sufficient. The community charge registration officer had to write to the site operators saying:

"It has come to my notice that you are sending out misleading literature to persons registered for the personal community charge. I quote an extract from a letter sent to one of your clients. 'This states that the caravan is for holiday and recreational purposes only. You have not been offered residential status, therefore the rates are legally due.'"

12 midnight

The site owner told the tenant that, because he did not recognise the tenant as having residential status, he had to pay rates to the site owner as well as paying the personal community charge to the local authority. The registration officer went to some lengths to state:

"Any person who considers that their caravan or chalet is their sole or main residence, has a statutory duty to register for the personal community charge whether the property they occupy has a residential licence or is for holiday and recreational purposes only."

He stressed that the site owners should give more correct advice to their tenants.

However, that was not enough. The community charge registration officer had occasion to write to the site operators again. He wrote:

"I am still rather dismayed that you have been charging rates to persons registered for the community charge, when I have advised you to the contrary and where regulations and advice given to me from the Department of the Environment, clearly states that rates will not be paid on a property where someone is registered for the community charge, irrespective if that property is a caravan, on a protected site or on a holiday site."

The correspondence continued, with the community charge officer trying to insist that the site operators should not seek to claim rates from tenants when those tenants had already paid, or were liable to pay, community charge.

I am not satisfied that this legislation has solved the problem. I am concerned that many of those tenants who have other anxieties about their future security on the site, will remain very worried that they will have to continue to pay the personal community charge because they are legally obliged to do so and they will also have to pay rates to the site owner because he can extract the money from them. They cannot do very much to protect themselves.

I have already said that, even where there is a simple dispute about the level of rate, those tenants are not in a strong position. However, in the case that I have described, they received demands for contributions to local government from two different sources, each of which claimed to be valid—one with the authority of the community charge registration officer and the other from the site owner on whom they were dependent for services. If they continued to give correct information to the council offices, there was the threat that their caravans would be disconnected and towed away.

The Minister must understand how dreadful that is, not just for people with a second home, but for people whose only home is that caravan or mobile home, and who rightly or wrongly have nowhere else to go and, in many cases, had take up residence on the site under the impression that they were allowed to do so by the planning permission and that there was no other reason why they should not regard themselves as permanent residents. Their permanent residence had not been challenged until the poll tax came along. That is so unsatisfactory that I hope that the Minister can give us clear assurances about it.

Mr. Portillo: I understand the concern of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that people living in mobile homes should not be required to pay both the personal community charge and non-domestic rates in respect of their homes. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 clearly provides that, on any given day, a property must be either domestic or non-domestic. A person cannot be liable under both systems on the same day, although he could be liable to different charges at different times in the year.

The treatment of rates liability under the 1988 Act broadly reflects the position under the old rating system. In general, under the terms of the Non-Domestic Rating (Caravan Sites) Regulations 1990, the owners of non-residential caravans are not personally liable for non-domestic rates. Instead, the caravan site is treated as a single property with a single rateable value, and the site operator is liable for all non-domestic rates. Any residential caravans on a site that are occupied as a sole or main residence will of course be left out of the assessment, because they will be domestic and therefore not rateable.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: I shall refer to the hon. Gentleman's point.

On a site which has residential and non-residential caravans, the rates bill may have two elements. One will be the amount attributable to holiday caravans, and the second might be any amount attributable to any other non-domestic property on the site—for instance, communal facilities such as a launderette or games room.

How the site operator meets the cost of his rates bill and the extent to which he passes it on to caravan owners will be a matter for him to consider in the light of his agreement with caravan owners. He may in some circumstances share the rating costs associated with communal facilities across all caravans, residential and non-residential alike. That might be perfectly reasonable if they all benefited from the use of the facilities. However, as I have said, it would be improper for him to try to impose on mobile home residents any part of the rate liability attaching to holiday caravans on the same site.

I must agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a possible difficulty on sites where the number of residential caravans exceeds the number permitted by the licence. The residents of those caravans will be liable to the personal community charge, and quite rightly so. The assessment of the non-domestic extent of the caravan site will be a matter for the valuation officer and will reflect the particular local circumstances. I would expect him to take account of the number of caravans permitted by the licence for residential

use and the number of caravans that are actually being so used in forming a view on the level of the non-domestic assessment of the site.

Enforcement of the site licence conditions is a matter for the local authority, not for the valuation officer. The valuation officer, however, in valuing a site takes into account the rent that a hypothetical tenant would pay for it if it were vacant and to let. In the light of that consideration the legal limit on the number of permanent residents would govern the amount of the assessment as a hypothetical tenant would be bound to take into account the likelihood of the local authority enforcing the conditions of the site licence.

In other words, I believe that the law is fairly clear. The hon. Gentleman seemed to imply that, by saying that the community charge registration officer had written to the people involved making it clear that not only was it his view that the community charge was due from those persons' non-domestic rate but that that view had been backed up by the Department of the Environment.

I fear that the hon. Gentleman, in trying to go further, even though the law is clear, is putting forward an amendment which goes too far because it would prevent a site operator from seeking to recover that part of his rates bill which relates to any communal facilities. It might be legitimate for the site owner to do that if the agreement allowed him to do so. I can see the argument for the amendment to the extent that it would prevent a site owner imposing on residents that part of his rate bill which relates to holiday caravans; however, I do not think that an additional statutory provision is needed to achieve that. Residents' proper protection lies in enforcing the terms of their agreements if necessary through the courts.

To end on a positive point, the law is clear, but we are certainly ready to do our part when the Bill is enacted, by writing to the trade associations to offer our guidance to their members on the proper treatment and attribution of non-domestic rates liability under the legislation. I hope that that may be of some considerable assistance to caravan owners in enforcing their rights against site owners. I hope also that that will be a valuable reassurance to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister for underlining what I take to be the law as it stands and for his willingness to write to trade associations to try to ensure that all site owners know what their position is. There remain some anxieties, but I hope that they will be met by the terms of the Minister's letter, asking them, for example, to envisage what would happen when the valuation officer has duly taken account of the terms of the planning permission and the site licence and has told the site owner that there are only 30, say, permitted permanent residents, although about 40 or 50 people point out that they are registered for the community charge and have no other home.

At that point, the site owner may say, "It is not my fault. More people are claiming to be permanent residents than I have ever permitted or the site licence permits. I am entitled to reclaim my rates from them." According to the Minister, the site owner is not entitled to reclaim rates from those who have been registered for the community charge, except any rates in respect of communal facilities, which were not covered by my amendment. I accept that that is a separate point, which must be dealt with in some way.

I am never reassured when the Minister refers to the site agreement as the basis on which the tenant can solve his problems because such agreements are often difficult to obtain and are frequently written in such a way as to make the tenant's position weak. Therefore, I hope that the guidance issued by the Department will be strong enough to remind site owners that when someone has been registered for the personal community charge, that person cannot be liable for rates other than those for communal facilities, in respect of the same caravan on the same site. That needs to be firmly underlined, and I shall take every opportunity to remind tenants in my constituency that that is the law.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

CARAVANS IN SCOTLAND: STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGES AND NON-DOMESTIC RATES

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Beith: I have only a small point to make about clause 2, which provides for retrospective provision and for repayments to be made, in relation to Scotland. How will those entitled to repayments know that they can make a claim for repayment? It seems likely that quite a large number of people will not realise that that money is due to them and will not be aware of the procedure, especially the closing date after which no repayment will be available to them.

It is important that the publicity should be widespread well in advance of that closing date. What steps are to be taken to ensure that those who are eligible for a refund, which in some cases will be substantial, will know that in good time and will therefore be able to claim it?

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friends' plan is that they will write to the trade associations—or perhaps I will—letting them know about their entitlements and the procedures that they will follow. I am sure that the trade associations can be relied upon to circulate to their members full details of how claims can be made and the cut-off dates.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's consent on behalf of the Crown signified.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

12.12 am

Mr. Beith: The briefest of intervals between Committee, Report and Third Reading has enabled me to look again at the point about which I was asking the Minister a question a moment ago in relation to clause 2 stand part. I am not entirely satisfied with his answer. We are concerned not only with site owners, but with individual tenants who may have paid a standard community charge and therefore be entitled to a refund. I am concerned about making information available to those people.

[Mr. Beith]

This seems to be the opportunity for the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) to make his debut on his return to the Government Front Bench, because I am thinking especially about those who have paid the standard charge in Scotland, who will be entitled to a refund but who may not know that and who will have to apply—in some cases, their executors may have to apply—by 30 September 1991 or lose the opportunity of a refund.

I foresee many aggrieved people in Scotland, and a few people in England with caravans in Scotland, discovering after 30 September 1991, that they have been denied the opportunity of a refund. Unless people are generally made aware of the provision, many Members will receive letters asking if there is any way in which the date can be extended, which they will send on to Ministers.

12.16 am

Mr. Portillo: In the vast majority of cases, standard community charges have not been collected by local authorities and so the problem is not widespread, but one wants to deal with it nonetheless. I believe that, as a matter of good administration, one should have dates on which various files can be closed, and there should be some sensible cut-off date.

As I said before, in relation to making sure that trade associations are aware, I believe that many people who own caravans or mobile homes will be members of associations which have newsletters, which is where we should like such information to appear. We shall also take great care to ensure that, in the caravan and mobile home press, to which many of those involved will subscribe, information will be given about their rights and the closing date for applications. It was always a problem to know how to reach all of a target audience, but the most we can do is to contact all the associations, with the hope of influencing their newsletters and the specialist press, which such people are likely to read.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Ministerial and Other Salaries

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Marine Pollution

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 12th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Concessionary Television Licences

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

12.16 am

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I last spoke in the House of Commons on the issue of concessionary television licences on 19 May 1989. I am not the first person to speak on the subject and, until the Government do away with paying for the BBC through a licensing system, I doubt that I shall be the last.

I wish to draw attention to the situation in Teesside at present, consequent on regulations introduced by the Government a short time ago. I wonder how the average person would feel if he was to receive an official communication from the National TV Licence Records Office, which reads as follows:

"Dear Mrs. Littlefair,

Thank you for your recent letter.

I have checked our records concerning the Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary licence for the premises you occupy and confirm that your name is listed on that licence. Therefore, there is no need for you to obtain a full fee licence."

The letter resulted in a delighted Mrs. Littlefair until someone realised that a mistake had been made and Mrs. Littlefair was told that the concession was withdrawn.

Did Mrs. Littlefair make the mistake? Was she her own enemy? No, because it was not up to her to make the application, which had to be made by Middlesbrough borough council housing department. Did it do so? Yes, it put in an application for a large number of people in Middlesbrough in February 1987, and it became clear that the department made a mistake when submitting it. Therefore, the relevant authorities received the faulty documentation in 1987. What did they do about it? They waited until it was too late to have it put right—14 months later—before apprising Middlesbrough borough council of the position. Mrs. Littlefair did not make a mistake; the council did—but it made it 14 months earlier. Then Mrs. Littlefair and the other residents of the Easterside estate in my constituency were disbarred from concessionary licences.

The heinous crime of the local authority was having put in a computer printout that quite properly listed the names of all the people, and their addresses, who were entitled to concessionary licences—all but four or six of them. At the time, their names had not been fully entered. I am glad to see that the Minister has a copy of the printout, which contains a handwritten annotation to the effect that those four or six properties would be added as soon as possible. They were added, one month later, but the Government now rigidly maintain that those people did not meet the deadline stipulated in the 1988 regulations. So poor Mrs. Littlefair and her neighbours have lost concessionary television licences for ever, because of a mistake that was not recognised or rectified.

I came across the case accidentally when the son-in-law of Mrs. Littlefair brought it to my attention. I discovered that she was not the only victim of this bureaucratic nonsense: it has happened all over Teesside. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) here. He knows what is happening in our area.

Langbaurgh is the other half of my constituency. There is a two-page printout of people in Langbaurgh who have been disqualified because of computer errors. A computer

makes an error, so an elderly person is deprived of the concessionary licence that his neighbours have. When first I raised the matter with Langbaurgh council, hundreds of people were in the same situation, but gradually the numbers have been whittled down. I am sure that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) will say a few words shortly about the exact figures for the whole area.

People who are entitled to concessionary television licences and have done no wrong should be told that the Government did not intend to disqualify them for this sort of mistake. We have had apologies, but apologies from the Minister do not help the people who will have to pay the full £71 licence fee. Sometimes the Government even make a concession. On 20 August I received a letter informing me that my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Knight, qualify because their tenancy commenced in 1986:

"We believe that they will get the concession. Once we have heard, we will let you know."

It is now nearly Christmas and my constituents still have not heard. Fourteen months, six months, apologies, but all the time innocent people are losing the benefits to which they should be entitled.

One apology states that the matter will cause deep disappointment. It will not; it will cause deep resentment, which is a different thing altogether. No Government should treat people in that way if they have made no error themselves. Much of the problem is due to the 1988 regulations, a nonsensical measure that set neighbour against neighbour and family against family. A lady of 58 was married to a gentleman in his late 60s who died. They had a concessionary licence when he died and his widow was allowed to continue to have it. But because any newcomer is under 60, she is disqualified from having the concessionary licence, as that complex of old people's accommodation is outside the scope of the regulations. Is that what everyone wants, and is it what was intended?

The widow's 84-year-old mum moved from one of the estates because she was getting a little frail and took up residence in one of the other houses in the accommodation. She is not entitled to the concession, even though she is 84. However, her daughter, who is only 58, is entitled to keep the concession. Such nonsense does not make for good government.

The Government will have to make a change. I know my hon. Friend the Minister very well. He is in the position that many Ministers have been in of defending the indefensible. Only a few months ago, the House was told by a Minister that the Government could not give additional pensions to war widows before a given date. There was pressure in the House and within a few weeks a Minister said, "We have found the money." There was a chorus of hallelujah. It can be done because, if there is a will, there is a way.

The Minister may say that a change requires primary legislation. I have been here for two and a half hours listening to a debate that arose because the Government cocked up and had to put matters right by introducing primary legislation. They could do the same with the 1988 regulations.

Because of my interest in the subject, a little piece of paper from a housing association floated on to my desk. It is a letter about satellite television and I shall read part of it:

"The film channel is one for which the hire or purchase of a decoder would be necessary. Once the rules on franchising are relaxed on 1 January 1991, Telefusion will offer the Trust the addition of 4 channels of Sky Television. The cost would be an extra 54p on the service charge. For Assured Tenants this would be at the annual rent increase, and for Secured Tenants when the rent is next registered after the completion of the work. This will be eligible for Housing Benefit. Anyone on Housing Benefit, therefore, will receive the service free of charge."

Any minute now, all old people in accommodation in which satellite television is available will be able to have it beamed in and paid for out of housing benefit. I bet that the Government have not thought that one through, any more than they thought through any of the matters that cause all the trouble over concessionary licences.

There is only one way to deal with the problem and it is to abolish the licence. The more it is tinkered with, the more anomalies will arise. The time has come for the Government to stop Back Benchers such as me from moaning about an issue that is as indefensible as their stance on pensions for war widows. It is time for action. My hon. Friend the Minister will say that within the regulations he can do nothing. He can get the regulations changed.

12.30 am

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I thank the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) for giving me a chance to participate in the debate. We do not agree on much, and I am pleased that this evening we agree on the issue that he has raised. I am sure that he will maintain pressure on the Minister, as I will. The issue will not go away. If the Minister wants to deal with it, he can do so, as the hon. Member for Langbaurgh said, in a clear and positive way. If he does not want late-night debates and does not want to be harried on the issue, that is what he should do. Given the injustice and the downright stupidity of the present situation, we shall maintain our pressure on the Minister.

As the hon. Member for Langbaurgh said, it is necessary to think things through. We are not interested in apportioning blame. As has been said, a computer fault created the anomaly to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention. As a result, individuals are being discriminated against, unfairly and unjustly. We could take the time of the House to refer to many of the examples that we have to hand, but I shall quote only one. Mrs. Cross, of Shinwell crescent, Southbank, moved into sheltered accommodation in October 1987. It is within the Government's definition of sheltered. There is a resident warden, not a mobile, visiting warden. She became an old-age pensioner on 30 January 1988. She has been denied a concessionary licence because of a computer error, which led to "Not OAP" instead of "OAP" appearing in the final column of the relevant document.

Like many others, Mrs. Cross feels strongly that the Government, by what they are doing, are waiting for her and others to die. It is as crude as that. As the relevant provision applies before May 1988 and not afterwards, the problem will eventually disappear, because those concerned will no longer be with us. If that is how we plan to treat people who have served this country, as many of the pensioners who come to see the hon. Member for Langbaurgh and I would say, we should be ashamed of ourselves. That is not the way in which such people should be treated in their twilight years, but that is exactly what the Government are doing.

As the hon. Member for Langbaurgh said, the basic problem is the nature of the relevant legislation as it found

[Ms. Marjorie Mowlam]

its way on to the statute book. It is discriminatory legislation and it will not work. The outcome is appalling for many pensioners on Teesside.

The solution is simple. Primary legislation could be introduced quickly to achieve the end that we want. We can assure the Minister that if parliamentary time is not made available we shall take other routes and adopt other courses of action. We shall place the matter before the ombudsman and keep the issue on the political agenda. A rational, humane and sane decision from the Minister this evening would save much Government time, a great deal of taxpayers' money and a considerable amount of heartache and suffering for many of the residents of Teesside. I hope that the Minister will make the necessary effort this evening.

12.32 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) on securing this Adjournment debate. I know that the subject of concessionary television licences is one to which he has given much thought, not least because of the unhappy experience of his constituent, Mrs. Littlefair. He has fought with his characteristic tenacity and vigour against the injustice to which he believes that she has been subjected. He has taken the opportunity this evening, as he did during the most recent Home Office questions on 15 November, to ask about Mrs. Littlefair and her Dunbar avenue neighbours.

I realise from my hon. Friend's frequent representations that the Government's general position must be well known to him. He gave some indication of that this evening. That means that there is nothing very fresh for me to say. I apologise if once again I go over ground that is rather familiar.

I noted what the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) had to say during her short "harry" about concessionary television licences in general and about the position of one of her constituents. I am not familiar with the details of the case to which she referred and I shall acquaint myself with it after the debate. It seems from what the hon. Lady said that it was another instance of a constituent who might have been entitled to a concessionary licence under the rules as they existed previously, that for some reason an application had not been made and, therefore, the lady did not have a concessionary licence.

It would be sensible to set the issue in context. To do that I must recount briefly the history of the scheme and the background to the changes that we were forced to make to the regulations in 1988 as a result of the Kirklees judgment. The concessionary scheme had existed in much the same form for the preceding 20 years. It was intended to benefit pensioners and, latterly, disabled people living in residential homes or comparable sheltered housing provided by a local authority or a housing association. That aim had been endorsed by successive Governments, whatever their political persuasion.

However, the Kirklees judgment changed all that. One of three tests for eligibility under the regulations was whether a common facility was provided for all the residents. The effect of the Kirklees judgment was not only to widen that part of the definition but to call into question the scope of the other two tests—that the accommodation must form groups and be specially provided for retirement pensioners or disabled people. The judgment thus undermined the long-standing principle of the scheme, and opened the way for its extension to large numbers of people in mainstream housing. That was never the intention. The whole basis of the scheme was therefore on the point of breaking down, while the BBC faced the prospect of a considerable loss of revenue.

We could, of course, have solved the problem by abolishing the scheme—a possibility to which my hon. Friend referred. But we did not want to take away a long-standing concession that had benefited many people.

Mr. Holt: With respect to my hon. Friend, I am sure that, when he checks *Hansard,* he will find that I did not say that I wanted to do away with the concession. I said that I wanted to do away with the licence.

Mr. Lloyd: I admit that I did not think that it fitted in with the general tenor of my hon. Friend's speech to suggest that the only way to deal with the anomalies was to abolish the scheme. I accept his correction, which makes logic of his argument.

After long and careful consideration, we concluded that the most sensible thing to do was to restore the underlying intention of the scheme. To give effect to that decision, we introduced new regulations which defined more closely the type of sheltered accommodation which would qualify in future. The regulations came into force on 19 May 1988. Under the new regulations, qualifying accommmodation had to form part of a group of at least four dwellings within a common and exclusive boundary, and be served by a full-time or resident warden, so that the accommodation could be seen to form a cohesive, self-contained unit with appropriate care staff to hand, just like a residential home.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): My hon. Friend will be aware that, in an estate of essentially sheltered accommodation of perhaps 50 dwellings, new arrivals can be disqualified from benefiting from the concessionary licence merely because one or two dwellings are occupied by persons who are not entitled to the usual benefits associated with sheltered accommodation. That is hardly fair.

Mr. Lloyd: The concession is for accommodation for those of retirement age. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh referred to this point. A scheme would not necessarily be excluded by one under-age occupant if that scheme was provided with the intention of being eligible only for certain categories of people. Therefore, the example mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) would not necessarily exclude others in the scheme from enjoying the benefits of it. It is necessary for local authorities to organise their warden-controlled units so that they are for those of retirement age, or otherwise they put the concession in jeopardy.

The tenor of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh was to question why the scheme was not more flexible. In a statutory scheme, which this is, a clear line must be drawn between accommodation that qualifies and that which does not. As the Kirklees judgment signally demonstrated, failure to do that is a recipe for anomaly

and invites challenge. We had to provide a formula which was legally coherent and which could be sustained in court.

We recognised that changing the scheme in the way we did could mean that many people who had benefited previously would cease to qualify. We therefore included a provision in the 1988 regulations that preserved the right to existing beneficiaries for their lifetime, provided that they continued to live in accommodation that would have qualified under the old regulations. Consequently, in some schemes residents continue to enjoy the benefit of the concessionary licence, even though the scheme itself no longer qualifies. However, that can apply only to residents who had the concession before the new regulations came into force on 19 May 1988.

People who moved into such schemes after that date cannot obtain the concession unless, of course, they have preserved rights from their previous accommodation. Thus, neighbours in the same non-qualifying scheme may sometimes be treated differently, with existing beneficiaries continuing to enjoy a concession that newcomers cannot enjoy. That, however, is an inevitable consequence of the saving provision in the regulations, and our determination not to take the concession away from someone who already had it.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will not, because time is creeping on. If I have a moment at the end, I shall certainly do so.

The redrawing of the regulations also meant, of course, that some pensioners living in accommodation which might have qualified under the old regulations, and who had not yet applied for the concession—for whatever reason—ceased to be eligible. But, once the regulations had changed, we could no longer deal with new applications under the old regulations. To have done so would, of course, have undermined the purpose of the new regulations.

However, provided that an application had been submitted before the regulations changed, we were still able to consider it under the old regulations, although—because of pressure of work at the National Television Licence Records Office—it often took some time to process. Over the transitionary period, therefore, the date of application became a crucial factor, and many councils and individuals sought to argue that they had applied before the regulations changed. Provided that they could substantiate that claim, we were quite ready to judge their case under the 1984 rules.

The case of Mrs. Littlefair and the other residents of Dunbar avenue to which my hon. Friend has referred is a case in point. I can imagine Mrs. Littlefair's feelings, and understand why my hon. Friend has taken the trouble to present her case afresh. There is no doubt that she was resident in Dunbar avenue before the regulations changed, and that, once her home had been connected to the mobile warden system, the address would have qualified under the old regulations.

However, the issue here is whether an application for the concessionary licence was made prior to 19 May 1988. This hinges on the status of an annotated computer printout sent to the records office by Middlesbrough council in 1987, to which my hon. Friend referred. It was submitted in support of some supplementary applications for the concessionary licence. The printout listed the names and addresses of several people whose homes had been connected to the mobile warden system, and for whom the licence was now being sought. It also indicated that a number of properties, including Mrs. Littlefair's, were

"being connected up but at the moment not applicable".

Long after the event—some nine months later, I believe—the council sought to argue that the printout constituted an application for Mrs. Littlefair. The records office disagreed. No names had been listed against the Dunbar avenue properties, and the records office was accordingly unable to regard it as anything more than a list of properties which might, at some future date, meet the qualifying criteria then in force.

It seems clear from the endorsement—alas—that it was not meant to be regarded as an application at the time; nor, in fact, could it have been, as under the 1984 regulations a concessionary licence could be issued only to a named person at a particular address, and no name was given. We reviewed—and had no option but to uphold—the NTVLRO decision when representations were made to us subsequently by Middlesbrough council and later by my hon. Friend. The law leaves Ministers with no discretion in this regard.

I fully accept that the circumstances of Mrs. Littlefair's case are particularly unfortunate. It is most regrettable—as my hon. Friend has said—that her hopes should have been raised by a letter from the records office, telling her at one stage that she had been granted the concession. That was quite wrong. The records office employee made a genuine error in interpreting the preserved-rights provision of the regulations. That came to our notice soon afterwards, when the renewal licence for the scheme was processed.

The simple fact is, however, that there is no discretion for us to perpetuate such an error once it has come to light. We have no power to allow an ineligible person to benefit from a concessionary licence to which he or she is not entitled by law. We could not, therefore, overturn the subsequent decision to withdraw the licence. I can only repeat my regrets to my hon. Friend, and through him to Mrs. Littlefair, that this mistake has occurred.

I shall reflect carefully on all that my hon. Friend has said, but I am afraid that I can offer no prospect for any change in the law which would help his constituents, although I well understand how unfair he feels that is.

Ms. Mowlam: The Minister pointed out in some detail how, as a result of trying to avoid inequalities in the 1988 regulations, the present inequalities have resulted. He has made that clear. He said that that is regrettable. Is he prepared to put it on record tonight that he thinks that the decision is unfair and unjust?

Mr. Lloyd: In these circumstances, there are bound to be some hard cases, because preserving the rights of people in accommodation that no longer qualifies would be seen as hard for those who move in, who were not there beforehand, and who have no claim on a concessionary licence. I believe that, after the Kirklees judgment had knocked a hole in the scheme, we had no option but to bring in new rules, and there were bound to be hard cases. I regret them, but that does not mean that the Government were mistaken in bringing in the new rules or in the form that they take.

[Mr. Lloyd]

Like the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) and my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh, I am saddened that this led to problems in particular places, especially where an application might have been made but was not made. If applications were made, we are happy to see them properly processed and the concession continued. If they were not made, it cannot be a matter for the Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

TRADE STATISTICS

THE COMPTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Address praying that the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 (Amendment of Schedule) Order 1990 be made in the form of a draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

"Options for Change"

1. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce the impact upon local economies following reductions in forces following "Options for Change".

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Local economic and environmental factors will be taken fully into account.

Mr. Fisher: I thank the Minister of State for that informative reply. I welcome the defence cuts, but I am concerned that the Government may implement them using solely market forces and a laissez faire policy. As the Government have at last accepted what we have been urging on them for some time—that there are real benefits in the peace dividend—will the Minister go the extra mile with us and accept that the reductions must be planned? Will he set up an arms conversion agency to plan them, so that when cuts are made in factories such as Radway Green in north Staffordshire and around the country the real benefits and skills there are used for constructive and positive purposes?

Mr. Clark: The cuts are being framed not around market forces but around the minimal requirement to ensure that this country is adequately defended against our enemies. The question of an arms compensation fund or conversion agency, or whatever Labour Members call it from time to time, is a hoary attempt by the Labour party to introduce interventionism and Government subsidy. What you are asking for—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] I apologise, Mr. Speaker. I meant "you" plural. Opposition Members seen to be aiming for a scheme whereby good taxpayers' money is used to counter-guess the commercial judgment of arms companies.

Mr. Batiste: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Leeds there is great pride in the skill and commitment at the Vickers tank factory in Barnbow? Will he confirm that the Challenger tank is performing according to requirements in the middle east and that the company is giving full support to British forces there? When will he be able to reach a decision on the Chieftain replacement?

Mr. Clark: I can confirm what my hon. Friend said. Challenger is performing extremely well in the region. I see the operational readiness figures every month, which show that it has averaged more than 90 per cent. throughout the period that it has been there, which included several difficult and strenuous exercises. Generally, it has taken part to the maximum in the preparations and the manoeuvres that are taking place at the moment.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister is on record as saying that he gives no thought to ethics in regard to defence procurement. Does that now apply to job losses in defence? Is his attitude just to leave defence cuts to market forces, putting thousands of people out of jobs? Is not it clear that the Minister does not have any ethics in relation to this aspect of defence procurement?

Mr. Clark: What a feeble question. The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to the much better articulated question that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) asked. I have told him that, at all times, our first consideration must be to ensure that the country is properly defended. All of us agree that job losses are to some extent inevitable as defence orders for particular items of equipment contract. Those companies are extremely successful. Their commercial judgment will govern their decisions and I have every confidence that in the long term they will benefit from conversion to peaceful activity.

Mr. Trotter: Will my hon. Friend confirm that whatever the outcome of the "Options for Change" policy, there will, in the near future, be a need to buy a new main battle tank for the Army? Can he confirm that Challenger not only performed satisfactorily in Saudi, but has met all the milestones of development of Challenger 2 satisfactorily, on time and within cost? Does he accept that it would be wholly wrong economically, militarily and industrially to buy foreign tanks when we have a successful British product available?

Mr. Clark: I am aware of all those factors and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House of them. I can confirm that all the milestones have largely been met.

Nuclear Weapons

2. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet the Secretary-General of NATO to discuss the role of nuclear weapons.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): I shall meet the Secretary-General of NATO when I am in Brussels later this week for NATO ministerial meetings. Nuclear issues will be among the topics that will be discussed.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Secretary of State recall last year's NATO commitment to start negotiations on short-range nuclear weapons? Will he move speedily to

support the mandate for talks to bring about the third zero, bearing in mind our commitment, under the non-proliferation treaty, to negotiate for disarmament?

Mr. King: The NATO review is continuing. The hon. Lady will know that, after the successful NATO summit in London in July, it was agreed by all the parties present that the alliance must maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces, and that work is continuing. The House will welcome the fact that, clearly, there will be a substantial reduction in nuclear warheads in Europe, but not on a unilateral basis.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members fully support the Ministers' statement earlier this year? We accept the mix of nuclear weapons and we understand that that will be necessary as long as the Soviet Union—and not only the Soviet Union—retains a nuclear capability and to ensure that we can defend ourselves against threats from outside the NATO area.

Mr. King: I well understand why my hon. Friend makes that shrewd and perceptive point. Although we certainly wish to see far fewer nuclear weapons in the world, his point has great validity.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: What assurances will the Secretary of State be able to give the secretary-general when he meets him about the effectiveness of the United Kingdom nuclear deterrent? In the light of the reasons for the scrapping of Warspite, will he be able to assure the secretary-general that the United Kingdom is capable of keeping one submarine on station at all times?

Mr. King: That is our determination, as we made clear to the House.

Community Charge

3. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had recently concerning the effect of the community charge upon service men.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I have had discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend is well aware of my long-standing concern about the effect of the community charge on service men. Can he confirm that certain councils are not following Government guidelines to waive community charge for service men who are serving in the Gulf? Does he agree that that is disgraceful?

Mr. Hamilton: Indeed, I acknowledge my hon. Friend's concern about the matter. The Government have now advised local authorities to remove personnel who have been posted to the Gulf or to other overseas locations from the community charge register. I am happy to say that the great majority of councils have complied with that advice. However, Gosport and Helston councils have refused to do so.

Mr. Hill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is far too important an issue to be left to the whim of local government? Is he aware that local councils will be looking at such community charge payers as a further means of increasing the money that they will be able to spend and that they will be reluctant to exclude tens of thousands of service men from paying the community charge year after year? Should not the community charge be paid directly from the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment are looking at the whole question of the future of the community charge and I am sure that they will take the position of service men into account. On the question whether people are removed from the register when they are posted abroad, we would appeal to the public-spiritedness of the local authorities concerned. It is very disappointing that those two councils have not complied.

European Fighter Aircraft

4. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the development European fighter aircraft are now under construction; and when he expects the completed prototype to undertake its first flight.

Mr. Alan Clark: All eight of the development European fighter aircraft are now under construction. The first prototype is due to fly in late spring 1992 in Germany.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by the late 1990s, the European fighter aircraft will be a vital replacement for the Phantom aircraft, which will be obsolete by then? In view of that fact, and in view of the recurrent rumours that we hear about the German Government's position, can my hon. Friend give us a categorical assurance that the aircraft will, indeed, reach the production stage?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The aircraft should ensure our air superiority in the late 1990s and in the early part of the next century. My hon. Friend cited the Phantom as an example, but the EFA will be superior to all existing fighter aircraft, including American F-18 and F-15 enhancements. I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks: the British Government are fully behind the project and intend to see it completed.

Mr. Cryer: But is not the EFA project a collaborative project, which depends on other countries' participation? Instead of depending wholly on defence contracts of this nature, which are extremely costly—at £7 billion in this case—would not it be prudent for the Government to develop civilian aircraft prototypes so that we can participate in the developments in civil aircraft? Otherwise, if the project fails, thousands of people—including highly skilled technicians—may be thrown on the dole as a result of the Government's lack of awareness.

Mr. Clark: In principle, what the hon. Gentleman says is indisputable, but, unfortunately, there is very little civil demand for a single-seater aircraft with the speed of Mach 2.

Mr. Page: Is my hon. Friend happy that the major elements that make up the European fighter aircraft have been developed satisfactorily and as far as is possible in the experimental stage before being incorporated in the main contract? Will he confirm that the plane has an expectancy of service well into the year 2000 and beyond?

Mr. Clark: I can certainly confirm that. Component development and testing are part of the development phase, to which all the participants have now signed up.

"Options for Change"

5. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a further statement on the study, "Options for Change".

Mr. Tom King: Consistent with the broad proposals for change that I outlined in July, we have already announced the early retirement of 11 Royal Naval warships and the decision not to proceed with the order for the eighth batch of Tornado attrition aircraft. We have most recently announced our plans for withdrawing units from RAF Wildenrath and RAF Gutersloh. Further announcements on other changes should be possible in the coming months.

Mr. Duffy: Whatever reshaping of the armed forces follows the review, does the Secretary of State agree that defence of the United Kingdom air space will remain the fundamental responsibility of the Government and that it will call for early warning—perhaps most important, airborne early warning? Can the Secretary of State comment on the progress of the airborne warning and communication system?

Mr. King: I certainly endorse what the hon. Gentleman says. We shall continue to depend on a comprehensive air defence capability and it will be our clear responsibility to ensure that that is achieved. The AWACS programme is proceeding on time and the first planes will be starting service in the first months of the coming year.

Mr. Devlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there would be great disappointment in the north of England if, as a result of "Options for Change", the long-promised move of the department of quality assurance from Woolwich to Teesside did not take place? Does he accept that, if that department were not moved, the only acceptable outcome for people in the north would be for the Defence General Directorate of Quality Assurance to be cancelled in its entirety?

Mr. King: I can assure my hon. Friend that the answer to his first question is yes, as he has never ceased to remind me of it. I congratulate him, together with other hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), on their diligence in the matter. I well understand my hon. Friend's concern. There is more disappointment to come for many hon. Members. We cannot talk about "Options for Change" or, as others do somewhat unrealistically at times, about the peace dividend and not recognise that a peace dividend may be a loss-of-jobs dividend for many people. We shall obviously seek to anticipate that and to give the greatest warning that we can, but I should be wrong if I concealed from the House the reality of what we are embarked on, which was generally supported by the House, but it has consequences, as hon. Members will understand.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Secretary of State go further and elaborate on what the Minister of State said in a rather glib answer? While the product and the assets might be specific, skills are less flexible. In view of his serious remarks, will the Secretary of State immediately enter into discussions with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and get in touch with Scottish Enterprise to ensure that a skills survey is done and that jobs in the public sector, mainly in the Ministry of Defence in Scotland, are not lost to Scotland and that skills are not dissipated?

Mr. King: It did not need an announcement from me for many companies to make their own assessment of the future, and all my contacts with the industries concerned have shown that there has been considerable diversification. I should trust the ability of those companies to identify where markets are likely to be rather than try to pre-plan them centrally, which has proved disastrous in the past. Obviously, we recognise a keen interest in the matter. We shall seek to keep hon. Members closely informed on their constituency and industrial interests. We are proceeding with "Options for Change". I can confirm that, as was made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), and it will have implications for several hon. Members.

Mr. Franks: When my right hon. Friend makes his further statement, will he be in a position to state the time scale for the SSN20, which is the follow-on from the Trafalgar class submarine? If there is to be any delay in the statement, will he bear in mind how helpful it would be to the company and, more important, to the work force and the whole community of Barrow if the Government's intentions could be made clear?

Mr. King: I understand my hon. Friend's close interest in those matters, which he represents to us most energetically. Obviously, I understand the importance to all the people of Barrow of an early announcement. I cannot comment any further today, but I confirm that we are very conscious of the matter and will seek to keep in close touch with my hon. Friend.

CFE Treaty

6. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the defence implications for the United Kingdom of the conventional forces in Europe treaty signed in Paris in November.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The consequent improvements to European security and stability will be of substantial benefit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Battle: While we welcome the encouraging peace developments in the Paris treaty, we would all accept that that is in the worst economic circumstances for manufacturing industry, in particular engineering. If the Government can subsidise consultancies for companies under the enterprise initiative, which is paid for by taxpayers, why are they so resistant to setting up an agency to tackle the conversion from arms manufacture to peacetime and civil industry?

Mr. Hamilton: The reason is simple—it is because we have experienced central planning from Government and interference in industry and it has been notoriously unsuccessful. The most unproductive companies have been supported and that has led to reducing the chance of survival of successful companies.

Mr. Colvin: Now that the CFE treaty has been signed and the German elections are out of the way, why are our partners in the European fighter programme dragging

their feet over their whole-hearted commitment to it? The answer from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was welcome, but is Britain to proceed unilaterally with the project? What about our partners, bearing in mind the fact that next year some of the items with long lead times will have to be ordered?

Mr. Hamilton: I can assure my hon. Friend that our partners in the EFA project are signed up to the development stage, so, whatever we have been hearing, I do not think that they have the option of pulling out.

Dr. Reid: The loss of jobs in the defence industry should be a matter of great concern to us all, but I should like to put another matter to the Minister because his answer was less than forthcoming. The word "vacuous" sprang to mind, but it is probably too substantial a word. What progress has been made on the follow-on negotiations to CFE-1? When are those negotiations likely to begin? Can the Minister say something about the pledge in the Queen's Speech that the Government would be "active" in their pursuit of further conventional disarmament? What activities have they undertaken so far? What approach are the Government adopting? Finally, what are they seeking to achieve in further disarmament negotiations?

Mr. Hamilton: Bodies are already meeting to plan the way ahead. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the CFE treaty still has to be ratified. The nearest estimate that I have heard of when that is due to happen is July next year. However, thought is being given to the follow-on from here and to what form that should take. Discussions are currently taking place on that matter.

Mr. Allason: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that when, under the terms of the Paris treaty, various sites in Europe are removed from military use, they will be restored to their former condition and that there will not be any toxic or long-term damage at those sites such as we have seen following the withdrawal of similar forces from the Warsaw pact and the eastern bloc?

Mr. Hamilton: Any reductions in any force levels in central Europe will be carried out in conjunction with NATO to ensure that the residual forces have a coherence and military stature that makes some sense.

Radiation Exposure

7. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers and ratings have been exposed to nuclear radiation in the past four years; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): Our records for the four years from 1986 to 1989 show that radiation dosimeters were issued respectively to 2,256, 2,546, 2,602 and 3,224 naval service personnel.

Mr. Skinner: Why, in a democracy, do the Government not tell the Select Committee on Defence and the House of Commons the answer to the question that is on the Order Paper, which is: how many people have suffered from radiation? If the Minister cannot give us those figures, why, now that the cold war has ended, do we have nuclear submarines at all? Why not scrap them and use the money for the national health service?

Mr. Carlisle: It is a basic principle of Ministry of Defence policy that all exposure to radiation should be fully justified and reduced wherever possible. The hon. Gentleman is nothing if not fair and I am sure that he has read the recent report from the Select Committee on Defence, which states:

"We have been impressed by the firm commitment of the MOD and its contractors to achieving the highest standards of radiological protection for Service and civilian personnel."

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend confirm that most officers and ratings would be more likely to receive high doses of radiation from living in Cornwall or from flying in high-flying aircraft than from serving in nuclear submarines?

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Exposure to radiation from the atmosphere is often substantially more than that received by naval personnel.

Mr. Boyes: That is simply not true. It is a fact that because of serious problems with the Polaris fleet, naval personnel have been subject to levels of radiation that are in excess of the limit advised by the National Radiological Protection Board, which is 15 mSv per year. The Government are acting with gross irresponsibility in their attitude not only to naval strategy, but, more especially, to the health and safety of submariners.

Mr. Carlisle: That is simply not true. We should not allow any naval personnel to suffer high levels of exposure. In fact, the exposure rates for people working inside submarines under the sea are much lower because they are protected from the exposure in the atmosphere to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) referred.

Low Flying

8. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy regarding low-flying aircraft over national parks.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department's policy is to spread low flying as widely as possible to minimise disturbance to those on the ground. This means that most areas, including national parks, will see some low flying.

Mr. Steen: I recognise the need for training flights, but is the Minister aware that the national parks were set up as havens of tranquillity for the nation? Yet the public are banned from 100 square miles of Dartmoor for 10 months a year due to live firing by the Ministry of Defence, and when there are low-flying aircraft one needs earplugs to enjoy any recreation in the district. Will the Minister ensure that for two months of the year, in the summer, low-flying training is conducted elsewhere than in the national parks?

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend has always been a doughty fighter on behalf of the national parks, but I think that he understands that we have to fly low if we are to have good pilots and an effective air force. The best policy is to spread low flying as widely as possible. If we were to keep low flying away from the national parks, we should have to concentrate it in more populated regions, but we try hard to keep low flying away from the national parks at weekends.

Mr. Graham: Is the Secretary of State aware that the British Telecom telephone system in the royal ordnance factories operates between 7 am and 5 pm, and if a low-flying aeroplane overshot one of the national parks and crashed into any of those royal ordnance factories in Great Britain those factories would be without a telephone service? Does the Secretary of State appreciate how serious this is? The royal ordnance factory in my constituency has one of the most pathetic telephone exchange systems—*[Interruption.]* Is the Secretary of State going to answer me?

Mr. Carlisle: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, but safety is our prime concern and only the most experienced pilots are allowed to fly low.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my hon. Friend aware that those of us who unreservedly support the need for the Royal Air Force to be capable of flying low and fast, believe—as I do, representing 2,000 square miles of beautiful highland Scotland—that our tranquillity and peace is as important as anyone else's, but we appreciate that it must be sacrificed if the Royal Air Force is to continue to be capable of carrying out the role that it is now playing in the Gulf?

Mr. Carlisle: Perhaps more than any of my right hon. and hon. Friends, my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) understands the true needs of the defence of our country.

Submarines (Log Books)

9. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the log books of all British submarines for the period between 12 noon and 4 pm on 5 September 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No, Sir. However, unclassified extracts from Royal Navy submarine log books for the period in question have been given to the High Court. We always make every effort to help the courts, subject only to security considerations.

Dr. Thomas: My question refers to the log relevant to the Inspire. Since the incident involving that ship, the Government have made it known that the Royal Navy held some responsibility for the loss of the Antares. There has been a loss of probably 53 people, involving 16 trawlers between Britain and Ireland since 1980. Will the Government set up an independent inquiry into those tragic losses?

Mr. Hamilton: The loss of the Antares was a great tragedy, but 380 fishing boats have been lost in the past 10 years, of which the Royal Navy has admitted responsibility for the sinking of one. The question whether the loss of the Antares was the responsibility of a Royal Navy submarine still remains to be confirmed by a court of inquiry.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the great apprehension and fear among fishermen using the Irish sea and among their families? Will he do something positive to alleviate it?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, indeed. A meeting between flag officers of submarines and representatives of the fishing industry is organised for this coming Friday, and I hope that they will be able to reach some agreement about an exchange of information which will be helpful in this matter.

Dr. Godman: In view of the tragic sinking of the motor fishing vessel Antares, surely when submarines steam through the traditional fishing grounds in the Irish sea and in and around the Firth of Clyde, there is a simple solution in this post cold war era: the Minister should instruct the commanders of the submarines to sail their vessels on the surface. Does the Minister agree that that would bring heartfelt relief to fishermen and their families throughout the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic?

Mr. Hamilton: We must accept that the accident involving the Antares was exceptional. There have been only two such incidents, if this one involved a submarine. There has been only one other incident in the past 10 years. We have to ensure that our submarines operate secretly, they have to operate under water and it is important that they operate in inshore waters. I am afraid that that is an essential requirement of good submarine capability.

The Gulf

10. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of British troops in the Gulf states.

11. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of casualties in the event of war in the Gulf; and what medical treatment arrangements have been made.

15. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel are now in the Gulf; and if he will make a statement.

16. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the total number of troops deployed by the United Kingdom in the middle east to date.

Mr. Tom King: The Government hope that economic pressure and the diplomatic moves now under way will secure Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. However, by the adoption of Security Council resolution 678, the international community has shown that it is also prepared to use all necessary means, including military force. To help ensure that Saddam Hussein will face a credible military option, more than 30,000 United Kingdom forces, including medical and other support services, are now being committed to the Gulf. Around 17,000 of those are already there. If Saddam Hussein continues to defy the United Nations resolutions and force has to be used, the stronger the allied force, the better the chances of keeping casualties low.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, if the worst comes to the worst and war breaks out over Kuwait, the Tornados built at Salmesbury in Preston, Lancashire, will probably save thousands of lives of troops on the ground by destroying enemy aircraft. Will he therefore examine the need for spares and for further aircraft, with a possible view to saving many of the thousands of jobs in Preston and at the factory that British Aerospace plans to close?

Mr. King: I can certainly confirm that the Tornado, with its strike attack capability and night-flying capability,

and the Tornado F3 air defence variant, are key elements in our capability. I can say nothing more about further orders at this stage, but I certainly pay tribute to the quality of the aircraft.

Mr. James Lamond: Given the tremendous response by the people of this country to the telethon in aid of the Save the Children Fund and the Government's claim to be acting in the name of these same people in seriously contemplating launching an attack which must result in the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent children in the Gulf, does the Minister detect an irony in that?

Mr. King: The Government do not want to see conflict, and we do not want to launch any attack. We want to see freedom and justice for the people of Kuwait. The Government and the whole world, with the exception of Iraq, have made that clear and so has the leader of the hon. Gentleman's party and his Front-Bench spokesmen. There has been overwhelming support in the House for the need to back the strong stance of the United Nations. No sane person seeks conflict, but if one is not prepared to use the threat of the military option, the alternative is the continuing enslavement of Kuwait, the continuing subjugation of its people and the continuing imprisonment of the hostages.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Secretary of State for Defence recognise that I have repeatedly tried to get comments from the former Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and himself on the estimates that have been made the likely level of casualties if war were to break out? What has the right hon. Gentleman to say to Brigadier Patrick Cordingley, commander of the Desert Rats, who believes that if a war breaks out there will be a bloodbath on both sides, and that the British Government should tell the British people officially that the British casualty rate will be about 15 per cent. or, on the figures that given today, that 4,500 troops will die? Does the Secretary of State not realise that an increasing number of people in this country do not believe that that sacrifice is warranted and that, frankly, blood and oil do not mix?

Mr. King: The first thing that the hon. Gentleman had better learn is that when people quote casualty figures they include minor and serious casualties and not just fatalities. It is quite wrong for the hon. Gentleman to offer that to the House because it is a total error. I will not bandy figures with the hon. Gentleman. I have angwered his question. At the end of my answer I gave the precise reason for Britain's sending more forces and I also said why the United States, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had increased recruitment. It is precisely to ensure that if the military option had to be used—and nobody wants to see that—the operation would be short, sharp and quick so that casualties on the allied side could be kept to a minimum. That is the reality of what we want to see.

Mr. Nellist: The right hon. Gentleman should not have sold them the arms in the first place.

Mr. King: If the hon. Gentleman cares about life and the avoidance of casualties, he should turn one eighth of that volume in the direction of Baghdad and tell Saddam Hussein to obey the United Nations. Then we would see a solution.

Mr. Squire: In direct contradiction to the last two questions, is my right hon. Friend aware that the British public are very well aware of the efforts being made by the free world to free a part of the world that is now subjugated, and if those efforts fail they fully expect our forces to play a part in freeing Kuwait in defence of basic human rights?

Mr. King: I think that the whole House, and all those who have considered these matters, will admit that the nations of the free world have stood together in a way that one would not have thought possible as recently as a month or two ago. The unanimity and agreement of the five permanent members of the Security Council have been important factors. In a very real sense, the authority of the United Nations is now at stake.

Mr. O'Neill: I thank the Secretary of State for the arrangements that he made for some of my hon. Friends and me to visit the Gulf. We are conscious of the high morale of our troops, their measured approach, their professionalism and the respect that they enjoy from their allies. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that our troops have the spares and supplies that they require to sustain the armoured divisions and especially the tanks?

Secondly, on a more domestic note, can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that every effort is being made to improve the dreadful telephone facilities which are the main means of contact between our troops and their loved ones and that British Telecom and Mercury are being given the kick in the backside that they deserve because of their failure over the past few months to provide an adequate and cheap means of communication between our troops and their loved ones in the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: I am grateful for the hon. Member's thanks, and I am glad that the Select Committee, Opposition spokesmen and others found it a valuable visit. I hope that the hon. Gentleman did not pick up those reports of shortages while in Saudi Arabia. I have seen newspaper reports here, but in Saudi Arabia our forces feel that they are getting the support for which they are looking. We are determined to see that they do and I shall not rest until we succeed. Tomorrow, I am on my way to NATO and I shall have with me a short list of suggestions of some of the matters on which our allies can help us so as to ensure that we have the resources.

We are working hard on the telephone connections. I am grateful to British Telecom and Mercury for what they are doing. However, the House must understand that there will be problems when 20,000 people try to ring home around Christmas day. On top of that, the United States forces will also wish to make telephone calls. We shall do the best that we can.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in deciding whether to exercise the military option, the Government and their allies will have to take into account not only the ghastly things that are happening in Kuwait, but the even more terrible consequences that could stem from Saddam Hussein being seen to get away with the aggression that he has committed and with developing nuclear weapons?

Mr. King: I agree with my hon. Friend. One or two of the interventions from Opposition Members could have come only from people ignorant of what has been happening in Kuwait. No decent person could turn his fire on the United States and the United Kingdom and excuse

Saddam Hussein's Government and the Iraqi forces their unspeakable behaviour in Kuwait and their treatment of people there.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, including one with the Prime Minister of New Zealand. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Archer: Has the right hon. Gentleman found time to consider which of the policies in which he participated over the past 11 years he now regrets and proposes to change? If the answer is that the Major revolution amounts to no more than requiring back-seat drivers to belt up, what benefits have the public received in exchange for the expensive telephone bills incurred by Government Departments in the course of the past month's plotting?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman one thing. There is one back-seat injunction that I shall not follow—I shall not turn left.

Q2. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Paice: Has my right hon. Friend seen this morning's press tribute to his and my county of Cambridgeshire for the way it has given as much management control to schools as if those schools had adopted grant-maintained status? Will he compare that with the proposal to introduce new, politically appointed bureaucracies, which may aim high but will inevitably lower standards to that of the lowest standard achievable, as one would expect of Labour party policies?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I saw this morning's papers and I know that Cambridgeshire county council has been innovative in education for a long time. I am delighted to see what it is now doing. I agree that expensive bureaucratic control of education will only withdraw resources from the classroom, whereas our policy is to ensure that resources remain in the classroom.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman has been good enough to refer to the personal debt of gratitude that he owes to the national health service. Does he think that it would be right to discharge that debt by getting rid of hospital opt-out?

The Prime Minister: Self-government within the NHS will improve management. That is why so many hospitals are seeking to opt out. In the past 10 years, more resources have been added to the NHS than anyone could have imagined. There is no doubt that in future the NHS will be at the centre of our concerns.

Mr. Kinnock: It is clear that the Prime Minister intends to make no change for the better in the NHS. Is he not aware that whenever a ballot has been held, consultants, hospital doctors, nurses, general practitioners and the general public have all voted by huge majorities against opting out? Does he realise that opt-out will intensify the crisis in the NHS? As the NHS has never done anything but good by him, why is he doing it so much harm?

The Prime Minister: Unlike some Opposition Members, I unfailingly use the NHS. Its future is entirely secure, with increased funding, as it has been for the past 10 years.

Mr. Kinnock: If the right hon. Gentleman believes that to be the case, should not he make a start by trying to convince his constituents about the Hinchingbrooke hospital in his constituency, where waiting lists have doubled in the past two years? The local press has referred to a wall of opposition against opting out. Will the right hon. Gentleman support his constituents?

The Prime Minister: Self-government is being proposed by the consultants and the staff at the Hinchingbrooke hospital, which holds the enormous affection of people in the area. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman something else about that hospital: it was not available under the Labour Government—it was this Government who provided it.

Mr. Higgins: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on becoming Prime Minister and also on the speech that he made earlier today, which I thought embodied the spirit of the late Iain Macleod. In that context, and in that spirit, may I ask him to give urgent consideration to two particular injustices—first, the position of those haemophiliacs suffering from AIDS as a result of blood products provided by the national health service and, secondly, the position of those who suffered as a result of being exposed to radiation from the atomic tests carried out immediately after world war 2? I do not expect him to give an answer off the top of his head—that would be unfashionable—but would he give those matters urgent consideration?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend knows, I like to consider matters before reaching a conclusion. However, I shall certainly accept his injunction and do so.

Mr. Ashdown: When the Prime Minister gave his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment what we now understand to be carte blanche for a fundamental review of the poll tax, did he rule out the option of abolishing it?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend and I will be discussing later today the precise remit for consideration.

Mr. Nicholls: Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to consider the latest computer analysis from the Institute of Directors on the top-performing companies in Europe? Has he noted that there are more United Kingdom companies than German or French companies in the top 100 and does not that say far more about the underlying strength of the British economy than the economic illiteracy that we hear from the Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. There is absolutely no doubt about the revolution in the prospects for this country over the past decade.

Henley-on-Thames

Q3. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will pay an official visit to Henley-on-Thames.

The Prime Minister: I have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Skinner: When the Prime Minister finally gets round to going to Henley and perhaps having a rubber chicken dinner with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, will he tell the voters of Henley why he has managed to offend the Welsh, the blacks and others—*[Interruption.]* including women, in his first seven days in office? Is that how he intends to start building his classless society?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was writing down the question that he intended his hon. Friend to ask and not the one that his hon. Friend did ask. In so far as the question presumably relates to Mr. Taylor, the prospective Conservative candidate in Cheltenham, the reported remarks—which I understand have been denied—are not sentiments that have any place in our party.

Mr. Adley: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the branch line to Henley-on-Thames remains intact? Does he recognise that if more decisions of that nature had been taken by British Rail in the past few years, and fewer decisions of the kind taken following the disastrous Beeching report, many more of our fellow citizens would today have the opportunity to travel by train which has been denied them by the closures of recent years?

The Prime Minister: I was aware of the excellent service from Henley. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment reports to me regularly on it.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Prime Minister aware that in some areas, particularly Sheffield, general practitioners have been prevented from prescribing certain drugs to patients, in particular young children? Without rattling out the old figures about how many patients are being treated under the NHS, will the Prime Minister tell the House whether under his Government patients and, in particular, young children will be denied the medication and treatment that they need?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the hon. Gentleman that the district health authority in his area has substantially more cash than in previous years, that the treatment of in-patients and out-patients has risen and that the quantum and quality of health treatment rises yearly.

Mr. John Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that one group of our citizens who should not be subjected to the community charge are British hostages in the Gulf? Will he agree to issue an advice to that effect, or even a directive under primary legislation, so that uncertainty, anxiety and anger can be removed?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend will find that we have already sent such advice to local authorities.

Q6. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Prime Minister reflect on the case of my constituent, John Hall, who is dying of leukaemia, which he contracted while working on Christmas Island? Will the right hon. Gentleman, as one of the first acts of his new Administration, reverse the Government's policy and in compassion, humanity and justice, provide John Hall and the other nuclear test veterans with the compensation that the House and the country believe that they so richly deserve?

The Prime Minister: I will examine the particular case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I am not familiar with the details of his constituent. I will discuss it and examine it.

Mrs. Currie: Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that today's performance has demonstrated that the two main parties have both the leaders and the policies for the next general election—for us to win, and for them to lose?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend It is not for me to reply for the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), but if he ever needs a campaign team, I will lend him mine.

Mr. Rees: The Prime Minister will recall that the Queen's Speech promised that a Bill would be introduced to give our courts jurisdiction to try alleged war criminals. Does that promise still stand?

The Prime Minister: That Bill is in the Government's programme and it will be presented to the House. There will be suggested amendments that the House will want to examine.

Mr. Rhodes James: Those of us of a particular generation well remember when the Russian and British people were together, when Mrs. Churchill led the campaign to support the Russian people. In the present circumstances, will not only the British Government but the British people respond as they did during the last war?

The Prime Minister: There is considerable concern in this country about the difficulties faced by the Russian people and by President Gorbachev. There is also great warmth in this country for the changes brought about in the Soviet Union under Mr. Gorbachev's presidency. That feeling exists not only in the House but throughout the European Community and I have no doubt that the situation in Russia will be one of many matters discussed at forthcoming Community meetings.

National Health Service Trusts

3.30 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his decisions on the applications by hospitals and other units to become self-governing.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to make a statement about which national health service hospitals and units will become self-governing trusts in April 1991.

In answer to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I am announcing today my decisions on the 66 trust applications that I have been considering for implementation in April next year. I am also announcing my decisions on a further 111 expressions of interest that hospitals and other units have submitted for becoming NHS trusts on 1 April 1992. A full list of all my decisions is in the Vote Office and the Library.

The House will appreciate from the number of applications that it is not practicable to read them all out, or to give detailed descriptions of the units included in each trust.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because there are several hundred separate hospitals and units involved, affecting the constituencies of several hundred right hon. and hon. Members. I thought that it would be more helpful to give right hon. and hon. Members the information in written form initially.

Given the Opposition's request for a full statement, I am delighted to have this opportunity to restate the principles that underpinned my decisions. NHS trusts are a central element in our plans for reforming the NHS and improving the service that it provides for patients. No one should be in any doubt that trusts are, and will remain, within the NHS. They are not opting out of the NHS. They are opting into greater freedom to run their own affairs —freedom from much of the bureaucracy of district and regional health authorities, and indeed, Whitehall.

We have not been short of volunteers, and today's announcement is the result of a very vigorous selection process. In making my decisions, I have been concerned to satisfy myself on four key criteria. They are benefits to patients; leadership and management; involvement of key professional staff in management; and financial viability.

Against that background, I am delighted to say that, having considered all the applications and the comments made on them during the consultation process, I have decided to establish 56 NHS trusts to become operational on 1 April next year. I believe that those trusts will use the greater powers and freedoms that we are giving them to pioneer further improvements to the quality of care for patients that are at the heart of our reforms.

I received 10 other applications for trust status that had also been the subject of extensive consultation. The sponsors of two of those applications, from the proposed North Devon healthcare trust and the proposed Brighton hospitals trust, have asked me to defer their applications, and I have agreed. I am confident that those applicants have the potential to become successful trusts in the future.

I am confident also that the remaining eight applicants have the same potential to become successful trusts. However, I believe that, given the very significant management tasks that they face, it would not be right to establish them as trusts now. I know that that decision will come as a disappointment, and I have written to each trust setting out my decisions.

I have also decided that a further 111 hospitals and other units that expressed an interest in trust status can proceed to work up applications to become operational in April 1992. I should make it clear that those expressions of interest in no way commit the hospitals or other units to making an application. I shall also be considering four further expressions of interest from colleges of nursing.

The response to the trust initiative shows that those working in the NHS understand, and are keen to take advantage of, the very real benefits of trust status. It is very likely that over time, trust status will be the natural model for units providing patient care. My decision to establish the first wave of trusts marks a further step in the implementation of our programme of reforms. It underlines the Government's commitment to the NHS and to improving the quality of care for patients.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, until we tabled this private notice question, it was his intention to make his statement at a press conference at 3.30 pm? On reflection, does he not agree that a statement of such importance was better made in the House than to the press, and that his protestations of delight would be more convincing had he offered a statement to the House in the first place?

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that today's announcement makes a mockery of the consultation process? Is he aware that more than 70 ballots have been held in the communities served by the hospitals concerned? Does he know—does he care—that, on average, 83 per cent. of local general practitioners voted against the applications, and that an average of 88 per cent. of local staff voted against them? Has anyone dared to tell him that the people of Bristol voted six to one against the application by the hospitals that serve his constituency?

How can the right hon. Gentleman claim that today's decision gives local people local control, when he has flatly ignored local opinion? Why will not he publish the report that he himself commissioned to audit the business plans of the applicants? Has he seen the independent report produced by New Church and Co., which concludes that many of the applications are almost totally devoid of realistic financial objectives? How can he ask Parliament to accept the transfer of ownership of hospital assets worth over £3,000 million without serious financial figures?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the boards of directors of the trusts, which he tells us will not leave the NHS, will own the hospitals and be able to sell parts of them; that they will hire the staff, and will be able to fire the staff; that they can decide on patient services and close patient services; and that, in every regard, their powers will be identical to those of the directors of any hospital now in the private sector? Given those powers, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us who will be appointed as directors? Will they be the same business men—the same friends of the Conservative party—with whom the Government have already peopled health authorities?

Does the Secretary of State understand that forcing those hospitals to go it alone as trading enterprises will break up the NHS—that, after today, those 56 units will no longer co-operate with other hospitals in serving the public, but will compete against them for business? Is not the game given away by the many applications that the

[Mr. Robin Cook]

right hon. Gentleman has approved today from those who make it only too plain that they intend to use NHS facilities to treat more private patients?

Finally, will the Secretary of State be generous enough to acknowledge the authorship of the policy that he has confirmed today? May I tempt him to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who chaired the NHS review body that came up with the policies that she put into practice? Does he appreciate that his announcement demonstrated that, while the faces may change, the health policies of the present Government stay the same, and will convince many who use the hospitals on his list of the case for a Labour Government who will bring those hospitals smartly back into the local NHS?

Mr. Waldegrave: Over the years, I have noticed that, when the Opposition do not have much of a case, they try to make a synthetic row about the manner of an announcement. So keen was I to hide this important announcement that I wrote to every hon. Member involved and provided all the material in the Vote Office. I am delighted to have the opportunity to reaffirm this policy.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made a point about ballots and asked whether anybody had dared to tell me things. I wonder whether anyone in his action groups up and down the land dared to tell him that many of the ballots that he quoted have been reversed. I happen to know of one near my constituency in Weston-super-Mare, where the ballot that he quoted, which went one way, was subsequently reversed by 80 to 20. The hon. Gentleman quoted Bristol. I know a little more about Bristol than he does. There was a subsequent ballot there, too. Did anybody dare to tell him that? I think not.

The point of trusts, surely, is to meet the objective that all of us have heard from our constituents up and down the land for many years: "Can't we get the management of hospitals back to hospitals, where it belongs?" How many times have we heard that in our constituencies?

The hon. Gentleman said that assets can be sold off. What nonsense. The instruments to set up the trusts, which we shall lay today and tomorrow, will reserve powers to the Secretary of State—powers similar to those to prevent district authorities from doing the same thing.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it correct for the Minister to speak knowing that he is not telling us the truth?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that allegation.

Mr. Flannery: I shall reword it in case you, Mr. Speaker, throw me out, as you have before. I withdraw —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please leave this to me.

Mr. Flannery: Is it right for the Secretary of State to be so economical with the truth?

Mr. Speaker: Unhappily, that phrase has come into the language.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), who may have become over-excited, will find nothing untrue or economical with the truth in what I have said. On the contrary, up and down the land, campaigns have been somewhat economical with the truth. I have one here that was issued in the name of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), which refers to

"Opting out of the NHS"

and concerns over opting out of the NHS. There is no question whatever of any of these hospitals opting out of the NHS.

The hon. Member for Livingston asked me to confirm whether we stand by the policies that we passed. Of course we do. They will bring benefits to patients and will achieve devolved management of the kind that both sides of the House, if they think about it quietly, should be in favour of.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before the hon. Gentleman makes his point of order, may I say that it will take up time? This is a private notice question and time is limited. What is the point of order?

Mr. Battle: The point of order is that it is difficult when the Conservative party plays games with the language. The phrase "opt out" was clearly used in the White Paper, but now we are being told that that is not the language that is being used. How can we oppose the policy?

Mr. Speaker: This is a private notice question. As Front-Bench spokesmen have said, the House is being informed rather than the press. We shall no doubt return to it on numerous occasions.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. Friend agree that self-government is the natural progression and development of the purchaser-provider concept, which now has widespread support, and will afford not only local control but local decision making to our hospitals? He announced that 56 hospitals have been successful in applying for trust status. Will he confirm that their plans include, far from a standstill in services, more consultants, a reduction in waiting times, renovation of wards, closer co-operation with general practitioners and speedier development of the community care programme? Does not that show that, under this Government, the best resources will be matched with the best management?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right. In every organisation of which I know, the management is better when it is brought nearer to where the real work is done. The instinctive reaction of the Labour party is always to go for an administrative, top-down and bureaucratic solution; that is not the best solution in each application—and I have studied them all closely—there are interesting and attractive proposals for how the hospitals will be improved.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Is the Secretary of State aware that this confirmation of a Thatcherite approach to the health service today represents 56 nails in the coffin of a nationally funded and nationally delivered system of health care? If the consultation between self-governing trusts and the health authorities is as much a mockery as the consultation carried out by the Department of Health in assessing the applications, what hope can there be at local level that there will be a proper spread of service delivery in the

health service? Did the right hon. Gentleman agree with his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, whom he supported in the recent election for the leadership of his party, when he said that he considered that a review of the health service reforms would be one of the top items on his agenda if he became Prime Minister? Finally——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would be unfair to the House during a private notice question for the hon. Gentleman to continue. He has asked his questions.

Mr. Waldegrave: I advise the hon. Gentleman not to talk such clichés. The hospitals will prove him wrong by providing better services to patients and people who have mouthed such clichés will look extremely foolish. I drafted that part of my right hon. Friend's speech, so I am thoroughly in favour of it. We shall be looking for further improvements, but the basic principles of the reform will go ahead.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): My right hon. Friend will appreciate that Bromley health authority will be disappointed that its applications have been refused. Will my right hon. Friend tell the authorities whose applications have been refused the grounds on which he felt unable to grant them? Will he also confirm that any subsequent applications, either in similar or in amended form, by those authorities will not be prejudiced by the fact that they have been refused in the first wave?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend those assurances. I have written today to the unit managers concerned to set out the problems that I thought needed to be further addressed before the trusts could go forward. I very much hope that that applications will come forward again next year and that they will win approval.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Under the public consultation, of the eight opt-outs that have been announced in the South West region, six voted overwhelmingly against the proposal. The Secretary of State clearly needs reminding that at the Bristol United hospitals—all the services in Bristol that cover his and my constituencies—the public consultation exercise conducted by the region produced a result of 83:1 against. The staff ballot conducted by the district health authority produced a result of 2,943 against and 255 in favour, although the Minister will not know that. He did not bother to take part in the consultation although he was a consultee. What right does he now have to override public opinion in Bristol? How can he call himself a democrat?

Mr. Waldegrave: The trouble with that argument is that the pre-printed forms and postcards were, in many cases, wholly misleading. An organisation called Labour Health watch—to which the hon. Lady may subscribe—put round stuff that said:

"We the undersigned totally object to . . . hospital or any of it's . . . outlying clinics or wards 'opting out' of the NHS."

One of the trust managers told me that he would sign a petition against his hospital opting out of the NHS and he would be quite right.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): With reference to the 1992 applications for NHS trust status, does my right hon. Friend accept that my constituents are strongly opposed to the acute services and the community services in Macclesfield asking separately for trust status? Will he take it from me that there is strong support in my area for the concept of the health authority as a whole opting for self-governing status? Will he instruct Sir Donald Wilson, the regional chairman, to stop interfering in my area? Those who serve on the health authority, the staff, the nurses, the patients and the people in my area want the whole health authority to opt for self-governing status. Will my right hon. Friend bring that about?

Mr. Waldegrave: There are arguments on both sides. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Opposition Members would be unwise to claim my hon. Friend as an ally, as he is arguing powerfully for an NHS trust, albeit a whole district trust. I shall have to consider the arguments carefully. There is an argument as to whether it is better for the mental health institutions to form part of a separate trust or of a whole district trust. We shall consider those matters carefully in the months ahead.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Minister aware that it would be helpful if he published the assessments of the financial viability of those exceedingly doubtful business plans? With the exception of one small group of consultants, everyone in my constituency totally opposes the application, and the cavalier manner in which the Minister is ignoring local people's views will be justly interpreted as typical of the Conservatives' desire to wreck the national health service.

Mr. Waldegrave: What the hon. Lady says will be disproved by events. I advise her not to put herself out on a limb. The hospitals will be better run and they will be available to NHS patients as they have always been. The hon. Lady will have a lot of words to eat.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, far from what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) claims, there will be a widespread welcome—certainly in my constituency—for the formation of self-governing trusts and that many people in my constituency realise that the arrangements are likely to lead to a better service? How will the system work for the approval of capital development schemes in the future? I am sure that it will work to the benefit of Southend.

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that there will be very successful developments at the hospitals in Southend when they are part of a trust. The capital allocations will come forward in due course. The new trusts will have a new system of external financing limits and those will be announced in due course.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The Freeman hospital had its application for self-governing trust status approved today. Can the Secretary of State assure us that its ambitions to create a monopoly on certain key regional services and to acquire certain key services from neighbouring hospitals will not be agreed until he and the regional health authority have intervened to judge whether that is in the wider interests of the people of Newcastle and the rest of the northern region?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not sure that people understand that the district retains its duty to ensure proper coverage of all the health aspects. If proper coverage is not given, it is for the district to ensure that one of the providers in its area provides it. The region also remains involved. The hon. Gentleman need not heed the scare stories that people have been putting about.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's continuous use of the words "opt out" is nothing more than the cynical manipulation of the fears of the elderly and frail? The national health service hospitals will not be opting out of the health service; they will be delivering better quality and more efficient patient care. In view of that fact, is my right hon. Friend at all surprised that the Opposition want to abolish trust status hospitals?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The nearest thing that the Opposition have to a policy —it has been leaked extensively over the past few days —is simply to abolish everything. They are going as far as they can. They have the idea that we must have what they call competition—I do not think that it is competition—but their model is completely chaotic and I think that when it is published it will be a laughing stock.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): In assessing the financial viability of the application by Central Middlesex hospital, which is opposed by staff and patients alike, has the Secretary of State considered whether the Central Middlesex hospital trust will be able to retain 100 per cent. of the proceeds of the sale of land that is currently occupied by that hospital?

Mr. Waldegrave: It will be able to retain the proceeds from land vested in the trust.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on deciding to adopt the proposals for Leeds St. James's and Leeds general infirmary. I welcome the fact that the two district health authorities in Leeds are to be merged into one under the chairmanship of my constituent, Mrs. Pamela Smith. What will be the situation in regard to the massive capital project for Leeds general infirmary, which, as my right hon. Friend knows, is essential for that hospital to discharge its present duties?

Mr. Waldegrave: The allocation of capital, which I shall have to make in due course and which the regions in turn will make, will, in the first years, ensure those capital investments that a trust could have expected from a region. I hope that capital investments will be able to develop a little further. They will be subject to capital controls, as in all other hospitals.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State clearly said that details of the proposed trusts and the various applications will be made available in the Vote Office and in the House of Commons Library. Will similar information be available about proposed trusts in Scotland, or will the Minister with responsibility for health in Scotland also be dragged screaming and kicking to the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady may have missed the fact that I was not screaming or kicking. I am delighted that certain Opposition Members are getting themselves out on a branch, which will fall off and that we have yet another opportunity to publicise our policy, which is getting wider and wider support in the country and will deliver the goods. I am the Secretary of State for Health in England and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, who has responsibility for health in Scotland, will doubtless make his own statement in his own time.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I welcome the commitment that he and our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have given to the future of the National Health Service particularly because I, or rather my wife, as an NHS patient, had a son born in Musgrove Park hospital, Taunton, two months ago? Is my right hon. Friend aware also that, for that trust to achieve its full potential, more informing and persuading needs to be done before next April? In particular, is my right hon. Friend aware of the importance that we in Taunton attach to the beginning of the second phase of the development of Musgrove Park hospital as soon as possible?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating my hon. Friend. Hon. Members will also join him in congratulating Musgrove Park hospital on the much more secure future that it will have. The announcement of the trusts will not end arguments about capital allocations in future. There will never be unlimited capital, but we shall try to allocate the capital that we have in a way that supports the kind of development to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I very much regret that the hospital in my constituency is added to the list. In the interests of fairness, will the Minister of State instruct the chairmen of the regional health authorities to publish the fullest possible results of the consultative process? Will the Secretary of State himself publish in the fullest possible detail his reasons for deciding that the hospitals will opt out? In the interests of fairness and in the interests of determining whether hon. Members' views are right, that information should be fully disclosed.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is up to the regions to disclose or not to disclose what they wish. The hon. Gentleman made a gesture that meant "opting out". That at least is progress compared with his hon. Friends. He understands that hospitals are not opting out of the national health service. The sooner that message gets across—a fair-minded man such as the hon. Gentleman will doubtless help us to get it across—the fewer unnecessary scare stories we shall have from the Opposition.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), when considering future applications direct from hospitals, will my right hon. Friend ensure that excessive weight is not given to the views of the regional health authorities, which are often excessively bureaucratic and which are not necessarily always in touch with local opinion? My right hon. Friend will realise that I have a particular and very famous hospital in mind.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are steadily streamlining and improving the standard of regional management. There is general consent now in the national health service that the standard of management is steadily improving, and it needs to. I note what my hon. Friend says, but I must advise him that I pay considerable attention to the advice of regional chairmen and their regional general managers.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is widespread opposition to the opt-out measures being initiated by the regional health authorities? Does he realise that this will be a black day for the national health service, in view of his

answers today? The national health service does not belong to the right hon. Gentleman or to the Government; it belongs to the people. This is probably the most regressive step that has been taken this century in social policy. The right hon. Gentleman has left no doubt in my mind that his intention is to dismantle the national health service.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am well aware that there is widespread opposition to the policy of nonsense that the hon. Gentleman has just described. Luckily, nobody in this country has such a policy, which is why his anxieties can be laid to rest at once. The national health service belongs to all the people of this country, and the management of it should be in the hands of those who have most commitment to it, which is not the hon. Gentleman or me—it is those who work in the hospitals.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question. We have already exceeded the time that I should normally allow, but as this is a very important matter, I shall therefore call three more hon. Members from each side, but then we must move on. I shall certainly bear in mind those hon. Members who are not called today on future occasions—and I am sure that there will be future occasions on this important matter.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Why has my right hon. Friend decided not to establish Harefield hospital as an NHS trust, in view of the support of the medical staff and its pre-eminance as one of the hospitals engaged in heart transplant surgery?

Mr. Waldegrave: It was, indeed, a difficult decision because, in many ways, Harefield is an ideal hospital for trust status. I was also aware of the strong support in that hospital, and in very many others, for trust status. However, I had regrettably to conclude that it had not completed its plans in such a way that I could, with confidence, agree them. I very much hope that it will be ready for trust status next year.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State realise that this sad statement shows that we have a new salesman, but the same policy? In that context, does he agree that the succour of the sick within the principles of the national health service means that commercial criteria have no place? Because of the drop in land sales and the decrease in the value of land, £40 million has been cut from the money available for Newham general hospitals' much needed extension. Since we cannot trust the Government even to provide facilities that are wholly within what the right hon. Gentleman calls the health service, does not that show that we cannot trust the trusts either?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not quite sure what point the hon. Gentleman was making. It is true that the price of land has fallen this year so, sadly, less money is available to the national health service from land sales. That is true, and we have taken account of that in our expenditure plans and in the public expenditure survey settlement for next year. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that what drives the health service is not commercial criteria at all, but that does not mean that we cannot learn useful things from the organisation of other businesses, including those in the private sector.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be wise in this matter to be aware of a possible distinction between the interests of producer groups, including the unions, on the one hand, and the interests of consumers and patients on the other? Does he agree that this afternoon's proceedings make it clear that even the possibility of making that distinction has passed the Labour party by entirely?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is true; no real arguments have been made, except against a policy that does not exist—taking hospitals away from the national health service. We have established that both sides of the House would be against that, but luckily that is not our policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) made the far more interesting point that it will be far easier for people to do proper jobs in the national health service when the distinction is made between those responsible for providing services and those responsible for ensuring that those services are provided, which is a real distinction.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): What benefits does the Minister expect from the Norfolk ambulance trust when its weighty application document gave no undertakings about future quality of service?

Mr. Waldegrave: That application, like others, argued that local, devolved management would provide a better service to patients, which I believe it will do.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the importance of the announcement is that decisions can be taken locally wherever possible? Is not the Labour party's fear that we might clip the wings of groups with vested interests, particularly the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, in which case we can, for once, agree?

Mr. Waldegrave: One of the proposals which the Labour party has at the heart of its commitment to the future and which would be catastrophic for the national health service, as for the rest of national life, is to unleash secondary picketing again, which would take us back to the winter of 1978-79.

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): Does the Minister accept that the correct term is "opting out", because if the hospitals go bankrupt, they will opt back into the national health service. I have that on authority from the Severn-Trent authority. I totally condemned the proposals for Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu hospital because the Government have not consulted the consumers. To my knowledge, no doctors agree with the proposal. If they send their patients to other infirmaries and hospitals still under the national health service, will the necessary finance be provided?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is widespread medical support for the changes. I have to judge in each case whether there is proper clinical involvement in the proposals, and I have so discovered. The hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh) knows that, at the heart of our policy is the principle—which I believe is accepted by the hon. Member for Livingston—that the money should follow the patients.

Public Expenditure (Scotland)

4.8 pm

Mr. Speaker: We come to the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland——

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the points of order after the statement.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): With permission, Mr. Speaker——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members know perfectly well that they must sit down. I shall take the points of order after the statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have said that I shall take the points of order at the usual time. I must ask the hon. Members to resume their seats—*[Interruption.]* I must order hon. Members to resume their seats.

Mr. Lang: With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about public expenditure in Scotland.

Following the announcement on 8 November of the Government's public expenditure plans by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I have now decided how I propose to deploy the resources which are available for my programmes in Scotland. As usual, a table summarising my decisions is available in the Vote Office and will appear in *Hansard*. Full details will appear in due course in my departmental report, which will be published in February.

My right hon. Friend said in his autumn statement that the Government had been obliged to take some tough decisions in this survey in the interests of the economy. The task of allocating the resources available to me under the formula arrangements has not been an easy one. However, the total sum at my disposal in 1991-92 is just over £11 billion, whereas the latest estimate of outturn for the current year in the programmes is just over £9·7 billion and the planned provision at this time last year was £9·6 billion. After allowing for transfers, notably in respect of my new responsibilities for training and for nature conservation in Scotland, planned expenditure on my programmes will exceed this year's forecast outturn by over £1 billion, or 11 per cent.

My right hon. and learned Friend, who is now the Secretary of State for Transport, has already, of course, announced a very fair settlement for Scottish local authorities. This settlement should, particularly in the light of the expected fall in inflation, remove the need for any significant real increase in community charge levels next year. I believe it was right to give priority in this survey to offsetting the effects on community charge payers of high spending by Scottish local authorities, but that has inevitably meant that the increases that I can afford for my other programmes are lower than I would have wished.

Expenditure on the Scottish Development Agency, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Training Agency in Scotland will be rolled forward as planned to launch Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise on 1 April 1991. Together they will have available gross expenditure of £477 million. Of this, Scottish Enterprise will be able to spend £406 million, of which £226 million will be training resources transferred from the employment programme. Highlands and Islands Enterprise will have £71 million, of which just over £13 million is for training and related expenditure. This provision will maintain the high level of activity which the new bodies inherit from the SDA and HIDB, including last year's additional resources for Caithness.

I have given priority to the health programme, which next year will amount in gross terms to more than £3·3 billion. This is 11 per cent. more than original plans for the current year, and 9·3 per cent. more than forecast outturn. This increase is greater than the formula consequences from the comparable programme in England, and will enable continued progress to be made with the major reforms which are under way in the management of the service, while maintaining patient care. These additions to the programme are particularly significant given that expenditure per head on health is already over 20 per cent. above comparable expenditure in England. Overall, planned expenditure on the NHS in Scotland in 1991-92 will be 38 per cent. higher after allowing for inflation than in 1979-80.

I attach importance to the environment and I am pleased to announce a further substantial increase in resources for local authorities' water and sewerage programme. This will enable me to enhance the programme by 17 per cent. next year to £166 million and to £238 million in three years' time. Planned expenditure then will be two thirds higher than it was this year, and more than double the level for 1988-89. I am sure that this major increase will be widely welcomed by everyone who cares for the environment. Local authorities will be able to make continuing improvements in the quality of drinking water and bathing waters to meet United Kingdom and EC standards and the new £130 million sewerage improvement grant which my right hon. and learned Friend announced in June will be of considerable further assistance. My plans for the environment also provide for the establishment of NCC Scotland with effect from next April and for increases in the budgets of the Countryside Commission for Scotland and United Kingdom 2000.

In the education programme my plans provide for rising numbers of Scottish students at universities and colleges, for extra resources for school buildings and for the completion of the Scottish centre for children with motor impairments. In housing, Scottish Homes' funding will increase next year by 10 per cent. and local authorities should be able to maintain gross capital expenditure per house on their own stock at this year's levels, and increase their contributions to the partnership areas. Local authority improvement grant provision will be maintained.

In transport, we plan to maintain the excellent progress made so far on upgrading the A74 to motorway standard, and to start the final schemes to complete both the A9 Perth to Stirling and the A94 Perth to Aberdeen dualling. We will continue work on the central Scotland motorway network and on the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness route.

There has been a steady improvement in infrastructure and public services in Scotland over the past decade. It is this Government's effective management of the economy and prudent approach to public finance which have made these improvements possible, and the decisions that I have announced today will ensure that they will continue.

Following is the table:

£ million

	1990-91 Estimated outturn gross	*net*	*1990-91 Planned Provision gross*	*net*	*1991-92 Planned Provision gross*	*net*	*1992-93 Planned Provision gross*	*net*	*1993-94 Planned Provision gross*	*net*
Central government's own expenditure (including public corporations other than nationalised industries) and local authority capital expenditure										
Agriculture, fisheries and food	237	228	237	232	253	246	260	260	270	270
Industry, energy, trade and employment	349	252	348	251	601	528	610	530	610	520
Tourism	12	12	13	13	14	14	10	10	10	10
Roads and transport	387	384	387	384	378	375	390	390	400	400
Housing (*see* Note 5)	1,066	660	1,024	639	1,154	711	970	700	980	730
Other environmental services	369	278	334	271	415	344	430	360	460	390
Law, order and protective services	323	308	317	298	346	330	360	340	380	360
Education	451	450	440	439	543	538	580	580	600	600
Arts and libraries	35	35	35	35	41	41	50	50	60	60
Health	3,087	2,990	3,041	2,936	3,375	3,275	3,550	3,450	3,680	3,570
Social work services	39	39	38	38	51	51	50	50	60	60
Other public services	170	139	170	139	201	163	210	170	230	180
Total central government and local authority capital	6,525	5,774	6,385	5,676	7,372	6,615	7,480	6,900	7,730	7,150
Central government support to local authorities' current expenditure		4,020		4,019		4,389		4,510		4,620
Nationalised industries financing limits		−84		−119		48		50		10
Total expenditure within the Secretary of States responsibility		9,711		9,576		11,052		11,460		11,780

Notes:

1. 1990-91 and 1991-92 rounded to nearest £1 million. 1992-93 and 1993-94 rounded to nearest £10 million.
2. Figures may not add due to rounding.
3. Central government support to local authorities comprises revenue support grant, grants to local authorities for specific purposes, and income from non domestic rates.
4. The estimated outturn for 1990-91 is lower than that shown in the autumn statement as it takes account of changes to the nationalised industries' financing requirements since the autumn statement was compiled.
5. The housing gross figure for 1990-91 includes £10 million and the gross and net figures for 1991-92 include £170 million and £38 million respectively for Scottish Homes' loan repayments to the national loans fund.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his promotion. I gather from the public prints that it came as a surprise to him, but it shows the wonderful things that can happen when someone backs a winner. I particularly welcome his pledge to dialogue and accord in Scotland. If that is realised, it will make a notable change from the past 11 rather abrasive years.

The total announced in the autumn statement which has now been divided up is clearly inadequate. The problems of the Scottish Office which have been widely advertised in the press in the past week or two make that clear.

How can the Secretary of State defend a settlement that means a cut of £200 million in real terms between 1991-92 and 1993-94? If, as the Secretary of State claims, the settlement removes the need for any significant real increase in community charge levels, why are authorities such as the Borders, Dumfries and Grampian looking to poll tax increases of about £50 in the coming year? Does he not agree that local authorities needed an 11 per cent. increase in grant to stand still, are facing substantial new statutory duties in areas such as community care and face problems that arise from the changes in the Government's contribution to the cost of rebates?

I note that gross expenditure of £477 million is being made available to Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I am sure that the Secretary of State will understand that that makes it difficult to compare this year's and next year's employment budgets. Will he confirm that the new presentation conceals grim news? Does he agree that on the SDA's traditional role the increase in expenditure for next year is up by only 3·3 per cent. which represents a substantial cut in real terms?

Is not the right hon. Gentleman worried about the fact that, in 1986-87, the Welsh Development Agency budget was 55 per cent. of the SDA budget? In 1991-92, the WDA budget will be 88 per cent. of the SDA budget, and that is for a country half the size of Scotland. Can he confirm that, in 1991-92, nearly £60 million will be slashed from training expenditure in Scotland? Is that the launch pad for the training revolution which we need and which occasionally the Government promise us under the new structure?

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

Does the Secretary of State agree that, although he has announced a cut in gross expenditure on housing of £50 million in real terms between 1991-92 and 1992-93—in cash terms, a loss of £14 million? Those are the figures after allowing for the £170 million that will be repaid in 1991-92 by Scottish Homes to the national loans fund. Is he satisfied that that will allow the housing stock to be satisfactorily maintained? His statement contains a form of words which suggests that he has nothing like the confidence that he should have on that matter:

"local authorities should be able to maintain gross capital expenditure per house on their own stock at this year's levels".

Is it correct to translate that as a significant cut, because the number of houses will fall and no allowance has been made for inflation?

The Minister will admit that no one listening to him would guess that a cut in the roads and transport budget next year of £9 million in cash means £29 million in real terms? That will make sore reading and will bring little consolation to those who are waiting for good news about roads that never comes. I accept that the statement is not that of the right hon. Gentleman but that he has inherited it from his predecessor. He is predicting trouble, difficulty and turmoil in supporting in future years services for the most vulnerable in our society. It would be helpful if he would at least give a commitment to do better next year and halt the decline in funding, which is clearly outlined in the figures, in the run-up to 1993-94.

Mr. Lang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to the Dispatch Box on my first appearance as Secretary of State for Scotland. After that, the hon. Gentleman fell back into the usual well-worn complaint about inadequate resources. This year there is an increase of 11 per cent. on last year's anticipated outturn. By any standard that is a substantial increase, especially when we anticipate that by the time this public expenditure period begins inflation will be falling.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a £50 increase in the community charge. Such increases are completely unnecessary. We have made a generous increase of 10·4 per cent. in local government funding. To talk about substantial increases in the community charge and to blame them on non-payment and non-collection is totally unacceptable. The evidence shows that local authorities are collecting about 90 per cent. of budgeted income, and that will bring them close to 98 per cent. of total anticipated revenue from all sources. If they cannot meet the gap from adjusting their budgets rather than turning to those who do pay to cover the default of those who do not, there is something badly wrong in local government management.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the budgets for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I refute his suggestion that the news about them is grim. There has been a substantial provision of resources to enable these bodies to plan for the development of activities in their area. The hon. Gentleman is fond of talking about the net budget for these organisations. The net budget on the forecast outturn for 1990-91 for the Scottish Development Agency is £97 million, and the net budget for 1991-92 for Scottish Enterprise is around £120 million. That is not taking into account the addition of training provision.

We have made substantial provision for training—some £226 million for Scottish Enterprise and £13·3 million in the case of Highlands and Islands Enterprise—at a time when the demographic trend is reducing the number of school leavers by 6·5 per cent. over the year and when long-term unemployment has been falling substantially. It has fallen faster in Scotland over the past six months than in any other region in the United Kingdom. The training provision includes substantial resources for the needs of the training courses that will be available.

As to housing, net provision will be up £34 million. In the case of Scottish Homes, grant in aid will be up by 10 per cent. the growth provision of local authorities will be maintained at the same level as last year.

The roads programme next year will be slightly less, but over the past two years there was an increase of no less than 40 per cent. The figure of 40 per cent. in the context of the roads programme may be familiar to the hon. Gentleman, because that is the proportion by which the last Labour Government cut the roads programme. We have substantially increased it, and over the next year there will be much work going on in roads and motorways all over Scotland. That is as it should be, and this settlement has the right mixture of divisions between the programmes for Scotland's needs.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I also congratulate my right hon. Friend and neighbour on his promotion to Secretary of State. I am glad that he has announced significantly increased expenditure on health and education. Is he able to meet the Nature Conservancy Council's target for Scotland of £18 million, which is estimated to be the minimum needed to set up its new Scottish identity? How much money does he hope to set aside within Scottish Enterprise to help in Lanarkshire, where British Steel is so shamefully closing Ravenscraig and the Clydesdale plant, where there will be significant unemployment and where we should be helping with resources?

Mr. Lang: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome, which I appreciate, and for his support for the parts of my statement affecting the health and education programmes. There will be an increase in the health programme of 11 per cent. over our plans for last year, which I think hon. Members will welcome. There will also be a substantial increase in education, where net provision will go up by £89 million, or over 20 per cent. above our plans for 1990-91.

We have made provision to increase resources to the NCC by more than £1 million over the three-year expenditure period.

I am keen to ensure that all necessary resources are brought to bear to help in the economic regeneration of Lanarkshire. I hope that all bodies, public and private, will bring resources to bear and that they will use the capacity of their different schemes to regenerate the economy of that region.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I extend my congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman on his elevation, which was caused by the transfer of his colleague to the role of Secretary of State for Transport. Given that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first announcement as Secretary of State for Transport was about increased investment in the M25, which is in the home counties, will the Secretary of State press on the Secretary of State for Transport the

need to ensure that we get a fair share of transport policy, not least the electrification of the railway line north-east to Aberdeen and the extension of the A1 motorway north of the border? Although the opening of the Inverurie bypass last Friday was a welcome move, will the right hon. Gentleman continue funding for the A96?

Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the shortfall in local Government spending is partly due to the high cost of collecting the poll tax? In the extensive review of the poll tax that the right hon. Gentleman claims will take place, will he recognise that with a system of local income tax there would not have been a non-payment problem because the Inland Revenue would have ensured that the tax was paid? Will he give an assurance that, when the poll tax is abolished, it will apply to Scotland a year ahead of England and Wales? In addition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is unfair of the hon. Gentleman to ask three questions.

Mr. Bruce: If I may say so, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Front Bench——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not a Front-Bench spokesman, even though he may represent his party. He should have some consideration for his colleagues.

Mr. Lang: The north-east of Scotland and the north of Scotland in general have been and continue to be substantial beneficiaries of the roads programme. The Inverness to Thurso road has nine schemes outstanding, valued at £59 million. There are eight major schemes for the A96, and it has top trunk road priority. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Inverurie bypass. I can inform him that since 1979 £109 million has been spent on the Perth to Aberdeen road, and the last dualling stage of that road is about to start.

The cost of collecting the community charge is higher than the cost of collecting domestic rates because twice as many people pay the community charge. We would also expect a new system to be more expensive to collect at the outset. However, the collection costs represent only a small percentage of the total resources at the disposal of local authorities. In return for that, we have a system that is fairer than domestic rates because the burden is spread more evenly across the whole of the adult population. We will be debating these matters further, and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to develop his points.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) in congratulating my right hon. Friend and wish him every success in his new responsibilities. I welcome his announcement of a 17 per cent. increase in the water and sewerage budget, which should be of enormous help to the environment in Scotland. Will he press on regional councils the absolute priority of preventing the discharge of raw sewage into the sea, which is one of the worst examples of damage to the environment? There are examples of that in my constituency at Newtonhill and at Inverberrie, on the east coast. Will he please make that a major priority?

Mr. Lang: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome. I understand his concern about the discharge of raw sewage. We regard expenditure on this matter to be extremely important, and that is reflected in my announcement today. My right hon. Friend might like to know that we are talking about an increase in provision not just for next year but for later years. By 1993-94, the water and sewerage budget will have more than doubled.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Will the Secretary of State accept congratulations on his appointment from a member of the class of '79? I agree with the observation that some, at least, of that class are doing well. In the context of expenditure on the health service, will the right hon. Gentleman carefully consider the needs of general practice in the new town of Cumbernauld? In particular, will he carefully consider the need for a new central health clinic? The present health clinic has woefully inadequate facilities and is much overused, and the difficulties faced by doctors are very real. I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman about that matter, but will he today give an assurance that he will carefully consider the need for a new central health clinic in Cumbernauld?

Mr. Lang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his greeting, which is warmly appreciated. I listened with interest to his points about the health concerns in his area, and I shall ensure that those matters are drawn to the attention of the health board. We are increasing the gross provision for health by 9·3 per cent., and a health budget of £3·3 billion reflects a substantial rise—no less than 38 per cent. up, in real terms, on what it was when the Government came to power. I believe that, within those substantial resources, it should be possible to meet concerns of the sort mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I too congratulate my right hon.Friend on his appointment as Secretary of State, and I congratulate him, along with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on the return to the Front Bench of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), about which Conservative Members are delighted.

I remind my right hon. Friend that the Opposition consider that education and health will be important matters at the next general election and that our record in those areas, particularly now that spending next year on education will be increased by 20 per cent. and on health by 11 per cent., an increase of 38 per cent. over and above inflation since 1978-79, should enable us to answer all the humbug that comes from the Labour party, which was the party of cuts during 1978-79.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. He is right to identify those important areas of expenditure as ones to which we have given considerable attention and not a little priority this year. My hon. Friend might also like to know that we are making further provision for increased expenditure on education in the later years so that, at the end of the three-year period, expenditure will have risen by no less than 33 per cent.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Is the Secretary of State aware of the Shelter report "Some Chance", published earlier this week, which revealed that 10,000 young Scots are homeless and sleeping rough, and which called on the Scottish Office to make the young homeless a national priority? Why did he not mention the young homeless this afternoon and, more importantly, why did he not target specific spending to deal with the problem of

[Mr. John McAllion]

the young homeless in Scotland? Is it not a national disgrace that, at a time of rising homelessness and a housing crisis in Scotland, he should announce a real terms cut in funding for housing in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman will know, in making allocations to local authorities we take account of the anticipated needs of the homeless and it is for local authorities to decide how to spend their resources. I simply do not believe that, out of the resources that we are increasing by £34 million next year, it will not be possible to find the necessary provision to deal with that problem.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Is the Secretary of State aware that 1,000 Winget houses in the Carntyne area in the Provan and Shettleston constituencies in the east end of Glasgow have suffered for years from serious structural defects? The district council has no funds to do anything about that problem now or for several years to come, and today's statement, particularly in relation to housing, does nothing to alter that one bit. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) in wishing the Secretary of State well in his new position, but what advice does he have for the people trapped in defective houses?

Mr. Lang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. As I have said, the housing resources are being substantially increased. By the end of 1992, £1 billion will have been available to Scottish Homes since its inception. Within the available resources, it should be possible to meet problems of the kind to which he referred.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that his announcement today on housing is grossly inadequate? The vast majority of my constituents are suffering great troubles from dampness and other things which need to be taken care of. When he comes to allocate money to the regions, will he take account of the particular and special needs of Grampian region, which has a great deal to remedy and whose part-Labour council is prepared to bring forward its manifesto promises?

Mr. Lang: The needs and priorities asserted by all local authorities are taken into account and assessed in a fair and even-handed way when allocations are considered. Again, I point to our record on housing expenditure. Since we have been in office, a record £9 billion has been invested in housing in Scotland.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. I thought that tonight we might have had some Christmas cheer but, unfortunately, it looks as if the Scrooge regime will continue. My constituency has literally hundreds of young people who are desperate for homes but cannot afford to buy them because they have no jobs. Scottish Homes is not playing its part in providing homes for young people in my area. Tonight, as on many other nights, young people are languishing in the streets, living in cardboard cities throughout Scotland. Some young people will probably die from hyporthermia because they do not have a home and somewhere to sleep. The Secretary of State's pittance will condemn such young people to a life of abject misery. He ought to hang his head in shame, and should now start to solve the problem of Scotland's homeless.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman probably knows that we are covering the deficit for hostel provision from housing support grant. As to the provision for housing, I mentioned a figure of £34 million, which is within an overall increase in expenditure in Scotland of 11 per cent. over and above the estimated outturn for the current year —11 per cent. at a time when we anticipate that inflation will be substantially below that and falling when the programmes come into effect. It is a very good settlement.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I join my hon. Friends in congratulating the right hon. Gentleman and in expressing the hope that the cancelling of our meeting on Friday represented a postponement rather than anything else.

I remind the Secretary of State that the only commitment made in Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, given by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), about dowry funding for people leaving long-stay psychiatric hospitals. Given that that principle has already been accepted in England and Wales, is it covered by the statement? If not, when may we expect a similar commitment for community care in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. Our meeting has indeed been postponed, not cancelled, and I look forward to it. The point that the hon. Gentleman raises does not come within the substance of my statement today. As to the social work budget, I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that the net provision is to increase by no less than £12 million, or 31 per cent., over last year.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I welcome the Secretary of State to his post, and his expertise in the terpsichorean art. The only problem is that he might be running out of dancing partners on his side of the House. When the Government sort out the poll tax, will the funds that the Secretary of State has cut be replaced? Does he agree that he has announced what is really a standstill financial provision, for there has been no real increase over the year? When will Scottish water be safe to drink, and when will our beaches be safe to bathe from? As to education and training——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Two questions are enough.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Secretary of State have any particular——

Mr. Speaker: Order. A debate that must end at 7 o'clock is to follow.

Mr. Douglas: It was different for the Labour Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a Back Bencher. He is like everyone else on the Back Benches.

Mr. Lang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, which I appreciate. Far from cutting local government resources, I have added £67 million to the consequentials that flow from the settlement south of the border. Some of that was at the expense of the Scottish block and of my other programmes. That represents an attempt to lift the

burden on community charge payers. The onus is on local authorities to plan their budgets in a more economical and frugal way, rather than increase the burden without any thought for the costs imposed on those least able to meet them. The figures I gave show also the substantial commitment that we have to water.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): The statement made no mention of the growing housing problem in Scotland's new towns. Why has the Secretary of State not proceeded with the proposition from East Kilbride development corporation to build up to 2,000 new public sector houses? Is it because he has started out as he means to go on—as a mere cipher for the Treasury?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will know of the excellent progress that has been made in new town housing in the past two years. He may recall that it was I, as the Minister responsible for new towns, who lifted the general moratorium when I first assumed that office. As to the current settlement, there will be enough available to enable new towns to meet half their special needs requirements in housing over the three-year period.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): A few minutes ago, the Secretary of State said that housing resources in Scotland had increased. Would he care to tell us how many local authorities are now entitled to housing support grant, what proportion of Glasgow district council now receives the grant in comparison with the position in 1979, and how much of the capital allocation given to Scottish authorities in the current year had to come from the proceeds of sales of their own properties and how much was the result of genuine permission to borrow?

Mr. Lang: The first point is not directly covered by the statement. As for the second, in our provision for housing, instead of assuming a substantial increase in receipts—as has been done in previous years, with subsequent justification—we are assuming a reduction.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): May I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his promotion? It is nice to see one's former pair getting on.

Nevertheless, I was disappointed by the right hon. Gentleman's performance today. The £9 million cut in road financing coincides with a Scottish Office news release announcing that the Scottish Office is to promote private financing for the building of Scottish roads. I fear that we shall leap from a poll tax society into a toll tax society. Can the right hon. Gentleman give a guarantee that Strathclyde regional council will receive sufficient funds to bring back on stream the A77 upgrading and the link with the motorway?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome.

As I have explained, there has been an increase of no less than 40 per cent. in the roads programme in the past two years. We are not maintaining that trend this year, but there is still a considerable amount of work under way which still has to be digested.

The hon. Gentleman is rightly concerned about the A77; given his constituency interest, I understand his feelings. It was not the Government's decision, but Strathclyde regional council's, to postpone plans for the road for over two years. If the council manages to sort out its problems and present its proposals, we shall be able to take another look at the matter.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Have the expenditure plans taken into account the recent governmental changes? We should remember that all three contenders for the Prime Minister's job declared themselves in favour of an immediate review of the poll tax, once hailed as the flagship of the Tory party.

Does the Secretary of State agree with John Mackay, ex-Tory Member of Parliament and ex-chief executive of the Scottish Tory party, who wrote in yesterday's *Glasgow Herald* that the poll tax had turned out to be the rock on which the Thatcher era had perished? Will he take it from me that, unless the poll tax is abolished completely, it will also turn out to be the rock on which the Major-Lang era perishes?

Mr. Lang: I assure the hon. Gentleman that this statement is my statement, and that I made the final decisions—although, of course, much of the work was done during the period in office of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

No direct implications for the community charge arise from the statement, but I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Thatcher era has not finished—*[Interruption.]* The Thatcher era moves on under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). I am sure that, given that new, reinvigorated momentum, we shall win another period of office, which will be just as long as that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) should not be so sensitive about the difference between the progress made by him and that achieved by the Secretary of State, a fellow member of the class of '79. My hon. Friend has one distinct advantage: he will be back here after the next election.

As a result of the measures announced in the statement, will unemployment in Scotland go up or come down?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that we never make forecasts about unemployment. What I can say is that unemployment is now at its lowest since October 1980—a decade ago; that it has fallen for nearly four years, which constitutes the biggest single fall recorded; and that, at 2·28 million, Scotland's work force is now larger than it has ever been before. That is a record of achievement that the last Labour Government were never able to equal.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Does the Secretary of State plan to spend the night of 16 December at his magnificent residence, Bute house in Charlotte square? If so, after he has finished looking at the lovely Adam fireplaces, would he like to go down to St. John's church in the west end and join the hundreds who will be sleeping out in cardboard boxes for the whole night, just as many do every night of the year in Scotland's capital city?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one way of ending that disgrace would be to allocate more funds to housing associations in Edinburgh, which could then build more low-cost housing? Does he accept that those housing associations are fighting a losing battle with private speculators because of escalating land prices in the city?

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

Does he not realise that, in the midst of everything else in that capital city, there is a great deal of poverty, which will never be addressed unless the Government radically change their attitude towards public housing?

Mr. Lang: I shall have to consult my diary to see what I am doing on 16 December. As for the hon. Gentleman's question about homeless people, with planned gross housing expenditure of over £2·9 billion over the next three years, housing authorities have ample scope—if they also have the will—to pay more attention to the task of tackling the plight of the homeless.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I compliment the Secretary of State on his appointment.

I was surprised that the right hon. Gentleman's observations about Scotland's transport system contained no mention of the maritime transport network that is so essential to our island communities. What provision has he made for the replacement of aging Caledonian MacBrayne passenger ferries? When, for example, will the Suilven be replaced? May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that there are still shipyards on the Clyde that need those orders —especially Fergusons of Port Glasgow?

Mr. Lang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome.

We shall be making an announcement about shipyard provision shortly. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that the Government believe that ships should be built because they are needed and will be paid for, not just for the sake of retaining employment in the shipyards. We do not believe in allowing shipyards to build vessels for which there are no immediate orders.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I register my dismay, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), at the public expenditure circumstances that are the root cause of the industrial action taken by those long-serving, hard-working, serious night nurses at St. John's hospital, Livingston—people who would not normally conceive of doing any such thing? Will the Secretary of State—and, indeed, his responsible Minister—meet Dr. Baynham and Lothian health board to try to end the circumstances of the dispute? If he does not, he had better consult the present Secretary of State for Transport and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), because, sooner or later, the action will be spread to the great Edinburgh hospitals.

Mr. Lang: Of course, no one likes industrial disputes of this kind, especially if they take place in hospitals. This is essentially a matter for the health board, but I understand that the board is anxious to make arrangements to protect the nurses' earnings for a year, and to bring shift patterns into line with those in other hospitals.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath:

Mrs. Katherine Adams, for Paisley, North.

Gordon McMaster, Esq, for Paisley, South.

Points of Order

4.50 pm

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before taking points of order—and of course I must take them—I remind hon. Members that we have yet to come a debate on the budget of the European Communities, which must end at 7 o'clock. If we had not had that constraint on us, I might have allowed the private notice question to run somewhat longer. But I must have regard to the business before the House.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your problem. The Government did not seek to make a statement today on the NHS trusts and you granted a private notice question to the Opposition, my hon. Friends and I thank you for doing so. My point of order is simple. Throughout the country, 55 hospitals have been stolen from the national health service and have been handed over to hospital managements so that they can make a great deal of money. The damage that will be done——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That may be the case, but it is a matter of argument and not a matter of order for me.

Mr. Corbyn: My point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise a point of order, he must raise one that I can answer.

Mr. Corbyn: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is simply to ask when we shall have a proper statement on the subject and when we shall be able to debate the whole issue, so that the opposition to this crazy move can be voiced by the elected representatives in the House?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know, because that is not a point of order either. But I hope that there will be a debate, because it is certainly a major matter.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We were delighted to see two new hon. Members introduced today, but it will not have escaped your notice that their combined electorates are lower than mine and those of many other Conservative Members. Would it be in order for you to arrange that secretarial allowances paid to hon. Members representing well populated constituencies are double those of Scottish Members?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Leader of the House. I suggest that the hon. Member's point would be an admirable one to put to the Leader of the House on Thursday.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have called the hon. Gentleman once.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a helpful point of order, Mr. Speaker. When there is raised in the House an issue such as that raised today, which affects the constituencies of many hon. Members—including mine, which loses two hospitals and, in due course, its community services—it might be somewhat fairer if hon. Members from the various areas affected

were called by you area by area. We on Merseyside seem always to suffer from the Liverpool syndrome. You always call an hon. Member from Liverpool, but there are many more of us on Merseyside than there are from Liverpool.

Mr. Speaker: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says, and perhaps he will come and have a quiet word with me one day, when he might care to tell me, for example, who today he thinks I might have cut out so that he might have been called instead.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are obviously well aware of the importance of today's private notice question and of the importance of the House as a means by which I, as an hon. Member, can defend my constituents who are genuinely uncertain about whether they will have a national health service hospital to which they can refer their medical needs. I appreciate that you are not in a position to discuss requests from Ministers, but when a matter is sufficiently important that it should be dealt with by way of a statement—which would give you the opportunity to allow questions on the issue to continue for longer—is it possible for you to take that fact into account in the amount of time that you allocate to private notice questions?

Mr. Speaker: That is precisely what I did. A private notice question is normally an extension of Question Time, as the House knows. I would not normally allow such a question to continue for more than 15 to 20 minutes. Today, it continued for nearly 50 minutes, so I did take into account the very point that the hon. Member raises.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is a strong feeling that, unwittingly, you may have made a geographical error——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I am human and I am sure that I make many errors. I am very sorry if the hon. Member was not called.

Mr. Litherland: I raise this point of order, Mr. Speaker, not simply on my behalf but because no hon. Members representing north-west constituencies were called, yet three major hospitals in Manchester, including those affecting the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) are to go. Neither my hon. Friend nor I was called, although we wanted to make protestations about there not having been any consultations on the subject. It is clear that a short statement did not do the subject justice.

Mr. Speaker: That is as may be.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I can be of assistance. If one examines the list of hospital trusts, one notices that no fewer than 13 of them are in London. It might assist you, Mr. Speaker, if you were cogniscant of the fact that I am the chair of the London group and that my colleagues are happy for me to speak on behalf of London, should I be called.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether all the hon. Member's colleagues would absolutely agree about that. They have never seemed to agree in the past. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is now a Front-Bench spokesman. It is difficult ' ing a Front-Bench spokesman and the chair of the London group as well.

Mr. Banks: Not really, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman wears two hats.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I apologise for raising another point of order, Mr. Speaker, and I do not apologise for raising it, albeit in the absence of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who raised a point of order and then left. I should be grateful if you would say that you seriously deprecate hon. Members in any part of the House referring to new hon. Members in the disparaging terms that the hon. Member for Stockton, South used. For such comments to be made about two new colleagues who have just taken their seats is an undesirable practice, which should be deprecated.

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) said was not out of order. The House itself has a way of dealing with matters of that kind.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland), Mr. Speaker. May I inform you that the only hospitals in the whole of the north-west region that are opting out are in Manchester—in central Manchester and, in my constituency, the Christie hospital? May I suggest that in any future debate on this issue you recognise hon. Members who were not called this afternoon, and in particular that you recognise the essential nature of Christie hospital, not only as a local hospital but as a centre of national excellence for cancer care? I hope that you will bear that in mind in any future debate on opting out.

Mr. Speaker: I undertake to do that. I must remind the House that it is extremely difficult for the Chair, because I received the answer to the private notice question at the same time as the Minister rose to his feet to give it. It contained a long list of hospitals. It is an impossible task to expect the Chair to look down such a list and also to look out for hon. Members. I do my best, but I am sorry that I was not able to call the hon. Member and some of his hon. Friends.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance on the question of calling hon. Members when statements are made? I have no complaint, because I do reasonably well——

Mr. Corbyn: Very well.

Dr. Godman: I accept my hon. Friend's correction; I do very well. I thought that there was a rule to the effect that Front Benchers who hop on to the Back Benches to ask questions are kept to the end of the queue, where they should be, and that genuine Back Benchers are called first.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was a distinguished member of the Opposition Front Bench some time ago. I think that the time an hon. Member is called does not really matter, so long as he or she is able to ask his or her question.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter that is concerning me. Numerous Opposition Members have stood up in prime television time and said that the hospitals on the list, one of which is on the fringes of my

[Mr. Kenneth Hind]

constituency, are leaving the NHS. They know that that is not true. It causes the public who are watching much anxiety.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. What is the point of order? I called the hon. Gentleman, did I not?

Mr. Hind: No, you did not. The public and the House are being misled about something that is blatantly not true. Therefore——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not the moment to pursue that point. These are matters of major argument and debate. The House should have a debate at some stage, I hope fairly soon. The Leader of the House will have heard what has been said, and I hope that we may have good news about it on Thursday.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Not again.

Mr. Corbyn: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: That is very selfish of the hon. Gentleman. He has been called once on a point of order. He must have consideration for others who wish to participate in the debate on the European Communities budget. Is it a point of order? The last one was not.

Mr. Corbyn: Yes. I want to clarify what you said in your answer to my hon. Friends the Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about Front-Bench spokesmen who seek to raise points on a statement or a private notice question. Do they get priority over Back Benchers or not?

Mr. Speaker: I take into consideration many things, such as the range of Back Benchers' opportunities. The hon. Gentleman is not in any sense a deprived citizen.

Mr. Corbyn: I am not on the Front Bench.

Mr. Speaker: No, but the hon. Gentleman is regularly called, not once a day but often several times a day. He must have consideration for Front-Bench colleagues, who do not always get as many opportunities as he gets.

European Communities (Budget)

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken).

5.1 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM(90) 121, relating to the Preliminary Draft Budget of the European Communities for 1991, 8182/90, relating to the Draft Budget of the European Communities for 1991, and 9865/90 and the supplementary explanatory memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 30th November 1990, relating to the European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft Budget.

I know that the House has been waiting with bated breath for the debate to begin. This is my first opportunity to address the House on this important issue. It is an annual event that is of considerable importance for the House.

This year's budget procedure has been preceded and accompanied by developments of great moment in the world. We have seen historic change in eastern Europe, with political and economic reforms that the Community has rightly been quick to support. Germany has united —a welcome development that enlarges our Community. The United Nations sanctions against Iraq have had a disproportionate effect on three countries in particular— Turkey, Jordan and Egypt. The European Community has, properly, decided to provide special assistance to them. All those developments require changes to the Community's financial perspective.

In the past two years, European Community spending has generally been well contained. The figures for commitments in both the 1989 and 1990 budgets have been consistently below the ceilings in the financial perspective, at 2 becu and 4·5 becu respectively. The United Kingdom's net contribution was more than £2 billion in both those years. It would have been substantially higher but for the abatement provided by the Fontainebleau agreement.

The general level of spending under the European Community budget is likely to rise quite strongly in 1991, partly because of the exceptional factors to which I referred at the outset. There is, in addition, pressure on the agriculture budget, reflecting falling world prices— especially for grain—depressed market conditions for livestock and a range of other factors, including the loss of export markets because of the Gulf crisis.

The financial guideline for agriculture was largely a product of Britain's determination to prevent a recurrence of the runaway growth in spending that brought the Community to the edge of bankruptcy in 1987. The guideline sets a legally binding limit on agriculture support spending. The annual growth of the limit is confined to 74 per cent. of the rate of growth of Community gross national product taken from the 1988 base. That guideline is buttressed by automatic stabilisers for most commodities, which trigger price cuts when production exceeds maximum quantitites set by the Council.

Until this year, the system seemed to be achieving its objective of restraining expenditure. Cumulative expenditure in 1988, 1989 and 1990 was 11 becu below the guideline, but recent developments in the trend of agricultural spending suggest that next year the guideline may be under greater pressure. I fully understand the

concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), as expressed in the amendment that he has tabled, about that upward pressure. It will remain essential to resist it.

The House will recall that the inter-institutional agreement is a political agreement under which the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission have bound themselves to respect ceilings for each of the six main categories of Community spending for the five years between 1988 and 1992. Those ceilings are set out in the financial perspective. They need to be revised to accommodate expenditure which could not reasonably have been foreseen when the financial perspective was agreed.

The agreement distinguishes, within non-compulsory expenditure, between privileged and non-privileged spending. Privileged spending includes the structural funds, the research and development framework programme and the integrated Mediterranean programmes. This category will double in real terms in that five-year period, but for the non-privileged element, the Council has agreed to respect the maximum rate of increase calculated by the Commission within the framework of article 203 of the treaty. The calculated maximum rate for the 1991 budget is 7·2 per cent.

In June 1984, the European Council in Fontainebleau agreed a permanent mechanism to abate the United Kingdom's grossly disproportionate net contribution to the budget. By the end of next year, cumulative abatement under the mechanism will have totalled almost £10 billion, in addition to the £3·2 billion-worth of refunds extracted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) before the Fontainebleau mechanism took effect. On that score alone, Britain is £13 billion better off today than it would have been under the sloppy arrangements that were so skilfully negotiated by the last Labour Government. Those arrangements amounted to a scandalous betrayal of British interests.

In June, the financial perspective was revised to provide for assistance to eastern Europe and to Mediterranean, Asian and latin American countries. A small amount for structural funds and administration was also included. The effect was an increase in the financial perspective by 200 mecu for 1990, 1·2 mecu for 1991 and nearly 1·5 mecu for 1992.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Does the Minister have the sterling equivalents of those ecu figures, which might assist those who are trying to follow the debate?

Mr. Maude: No, I have not, but I can lend the hon. Gentleman a pocket calculator, which will enable him to do the sums with great rapidity.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): That is silly.

Mr. Banks: It was a genuine question.

Mr. Maude: I accept that it was a genuine question. I do not have the figures in exact equivalents, but they can easily be provided. If the House prefers to have them in that form, they can be provided. The difficulty arises because the accounts for the European Community are, properly, calculated in ecu. It is not difficult for sterling equivalents to be provided.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Are not we being a little panicky? Figures for international transactions are frequently given in dollars, and usually there are no protests from hon. Members. Taking the whole picture into account, does my hon. Friend agree that budget control is eminently satisfactory, not least due to pressure from the United Kingdom Government in recent years, compared with the previous position that he mentioned? That particularly applies to agriculture, which needs careful monitoring and depends much on the negotiations on the export refunds.

Does my hon. Friend further agree that the eastern European expenditure is being dealt with satisfactorily, that most German reunification expenditure is dealt with by German national expenditure and that the outlook remains one of further control and of remaining under the financial perspective?

Mr. Maude: It is right to say that the arrangements negotiated in 1988 have, until now, exercised a firm discipline on Community spending. It will remain of the utmost importance to continue that discipline. The present discussions on next year's budget illustrate how important it is to maintain that discipline. Although, for a number of reasons, agricultural spending has been well below the ceiling in the financial perspective, there is upward pressure for the future, and it will be very important to resist that.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: How?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend will be aware that discussions on the general agreement on tariffs and trade are going on at present. They should have at least the effect of restraining further increases. If, as I hope, a good agreement is reached, there may be a prospect of some reductions, which would be as welcome to me as to my hon. Friend.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the common agricultural policy budget is a massive aberration at the heart of Community finances? As we speak, the CAP threatens to undermine the general agreement on tariffs and trade and to impoverish not only the people of Europe, but those who wish to sell cheap agricultural products to this country. It is utterly foolish for us to vote for increases in aid from the European budgetary programme to the nations that are not allowed to trade with us in agricultural products. Does my hon. Friend further agree that his negotiations on this question on our behalf are really about whether the tradition of Adam Smith or the tradition of Colbert and of Richelieu will dominate European debates in future?

Mr. Maude: In reply to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, it is certainly right that we need to be careful to ensure that policies on agriculture enable developing countries—for these purposes, I include the reforming countries of eastern and of central Europe—to sell to us the goods that they are capable of producing. It is absurd for us to provide funds for such countries to firm up their economic reforms and, at the same time, to deny them markets where those products can properly compete.

For some time, I have argued that the GATT negotiations this year are, by quite a margin, the most important set of international discussions. Not only the future prosperity of the world but its future security depends on those discussions. I hope that those who are

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conducting the negotiations in Brussels at present will have in mind the terrible price that could be paid if a satisfactory outcome is not reached. There is a huge prize to be won if the discussions are successful, and a terrible cost if they fail.

Mr. Dykes: I am sure that all of us agree unequivocally with my hon. Friend's view, and we all believe that the Community negotiators have a special responsibility in that context. However, does my hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat ironic that the United States negotiators usually fail to remind us that the bulk of the internal support system in the United States—deficiency payments, which we used to have, but no longer have—amounts to about 82 per cent. of the total United States dollar support for American farmers.

Mr. Maude: It is certainly the case that none of the protagonists in the discussion is quite as pure as he makes himself out to be. All the protagonists have a negotiating position and, at present, those positions are incompatible. A negotiating position is, of course, one on which one can negotiate. If the negotiators fail to reach a satisfactory outcome, they will have a heavy burden of guilt to carry.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does not the Minister believe that the Government should now be applying themselves to getting rid of the green pound? Would not that be a considerable help in this matter?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman takes me beyond the scope of this debate. The green pound needs to be considered in the light of our entry into the exchange rate mechanism and the hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that matter.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: I hope that my hon. Friend can clarify a point about the GATT talks. Do my hon. Friend and the Government consider that the alleged 30 per cent. reduction in farm support is really a reduction? The Commission's proposals make it abundantly clear that farmers will be compensated fully for any reduction in subsidy, and that there is no question of freedom of trade being permitted. It would be helpful for us to know whether the Government consider that the alleged 30 per cent. reduction in agricultural support will be a real reduction, as the words in the proposal seem to show that there will be no reduction, but simply a reduction in subsidy, which will be compensated for by other subsidies.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is not a question of a clean and straightforward reduction, as has been suggested. Equally, he will be aware that a substantial part of the 30 per cent. has already been harvested—if that is the right word in the circumstances—reflecting the changes in the common agricultural policy since 1986.

I can now provide for the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) the sterling equivalents for the figures that I gave earlier on the first revision to the financial perspectives in respect of eastern Europe. The figure for 1990 was £140 million, for 1991 it is £950 million, and for 1992 it is £1,035 million, at a conversion rate of £1 to 1·435 ecu, which is the central exchange rate mechanism rate.

In September 1990, the Commission proposed a further revision to take account of assistance to the front-line states in the Gulf conflict: Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. It was proposed to raise the ceiling for category 4 and for the total ceiling of the financial perspective by 630 million ecu.

In October, a further revision was proposed to take account of the effect on the budget of the unification of Germany. The total ceiling for that purpose was to be raised by 1 billion ecu in 1991 and by just over 1 billion ecu in 1992. In return, the Council sought savings within current spending to offset those increases in part. In addition, a fourth revision has recently been proposed by the Commission to take account of agricultural rebates to Spain and to Portugal.

I want now to outline this year's budget procedure so far. The Commission presented the preliminary draft budget in July. For 1991, the preliminary draft budget was about 13 per cent. bigger than the adopted budget for 1990. I know that that will rightly concern the House. None the less, that budget was almost 4 billion ecu below the overall ceiling in the financial perspective. Total provision was equivalent to about 1 per cent. of Community gross national product, compared with the 1·19 per cent. ceiling allowed under the own resources decision of June 1988.

Two underlying trends in Community expenditure emerge from the preliminary draft budget. First, it provided for an increase of more than 13 per cent. in expenditure on agricultural market support. That reflected the expected growth in compulsory expenditure on agriculture which resulted from falling world prices rather than from any slackening of control.

Secondly, it provided for an increase of about 20 per cent. in spending on structural operations and on research and development. Those areas now account for almost 30 per cent. of the total budget. The budget also included 65 million ecu for measures to combat fraud, which was further evidence of the Community's desire to root out fraud, although much more remains to be done.

On 27 July, the Council adopted a draft budget about 830 million ecu below that proposed by the Commission and more than 4·7 billion ecu below the overall ceiling in the financial perspective.

In the light of developments in eastern Europe, the Council decided that, exceptionally in 1991, it would not be appropriate to apply the maximum rate procedure to non-privileged, non-compulsory expenditure. However, the Council agreed to cut the Commission's proposed level of non-privileged expenditure by more than it had in previous years and endorsed a robust declaration making it clear that the procedure adopted in relation to this year's budget was an inevitable consequence of developments in eastern Europe and implied no weakening of budgetary discipline.

At the same meeting, the Commission said that it would present proposals for a revision of the financial perspective in the light of German unification. There was strong support from a number of member states—notably from Germany and France—for our view that the revision should cater for unification and for nothing else.

Finally, the Council decided to take the Parliament to court over the 1990 second supplementary budget. The Parliament excluded some 780 million ecu from the amount of the 1989 budget surplus to be taken into the 1990 budget on the basis that inclusion would reduce member states' VAT payments below 1·4 per cent. and that the Parliament had powers under the treaty in respect of revenue. The Council could not and did not accept that,

because its immediate practical consequence would have been to postpone bringing to account a substantial part of the 1989 budget surplus, with a consequent delay in member states receiving the benefit of reduced contributions. That would contradict the requirement of the financial regulation that surpluses should be brought to account at the earliest opportunity.

For that reason, and for the more fundamental reason that the Council alone has competence over revenue, the Council agreed to initiate a court action to amend the Parliament's adoption of the second supplementary budget.

The Parliament presented its amendments to the draft budget on 25 October and voted for modifications adding over 1·9 billion ecu in commitments and almost 1·6 billion ecu in payments. In its amendments, the Parliament anticipated the proposed revisions to the financial perspective and thus threatened to breach the existing ceiling. As, in effect the Parliament has the last word on matters of non-compulsory expenditure, its amendments amounted to a challenge to the Council to approve revisions along the lines that it wanted. Otherwise, the financial perspective would be breached, and the inter-institutional agreement would be thrown into question.

Two other problems emerged. The Council debated whether to reject two of the European Parliament's amendments to the structural funds category—known as category 2. These concerned a new environmental fund —LIFE—and a fund called "PERIFRA", intended to alleviate the effects of the Gulf crisis on poorer and outlying regions.

The second problem stemmed from the Parliament's proposals on research. The Parliament wanted two things —first, to reallocate resources within existing multi-annual framework programmes and, secondly, a substantial increase in spending outside those programmes.

The amendments caused a number of difficulties. In particular, the reallocation of resources along the lines proposed could not be reconciled with the framework programmes agreed by the Council in accordance with the treaty and with the inter-institutional agreement, and risked serious damage to the concept of multi-annual planning that the Community has developed to lend certainty to the funding of long-term projects.

Following preparatory work in the Budget Committee and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, the Budget Council undertook its second reading of the 1991 budget. Initial discussion on 15 November was adjourned until 19 November to take account of related Economic and Finance Council discussions of the outstanding revisions to the financial perspective on that day. As expected, the consideration of revisions to the financial perspective dominated decisions on the 1991 draft budget.

In response to the presidency's report on its continuing discussions of the revisions with the Parliament, the Council insisted on a tough line, demanding off-setting savings from within existing headroom in the financial perspective. Moreover, as part of that process, the Council pressed for a satisfactory compromise on the Parliament's amendments to the 1991 budget—in particular, on research. The presidency undertook to seek an acceptable compromise.

In the meantime, the Budget Council duly adopted its second reading position—in particular, it confirmed the rejection of the European Parliament's amendments on research and rejected the LIFE and PERIFRA funds. Furthermore, the Council insisted that agreement to a limited number of new Commission posts should be conditional on implementation of the Court of Auditors' report on improved staff management. The amendments that were accepted amounted to 200 million ecu in commitments and 154 million ecu in payments.

The upshot was a revised draft budget in which commitments—at around 54·9 billion—are about 4·5 billion ecu below the overall ceiling in the financial perspective and in which member states' contributions are equivalent to 1 per cent. of Community GNP, compared with the annual sub-ceiling for own resources of 1·19 per cent.

Following further discussion at ECOFIN yesterday, I think that we may be close to an agreement on revisions to the financial perspective. There would be significant off-setting savings from within the existing headroom, the transfer of the Parliament's amendments on LIFE and PERIFRA funds out of the structural funds category of the budget, and modifications to the Parliament's amendments on research to bring them into line with existing framework programmes. The Parliament will undertake its second reading later in December, with a view to adopting the final 1991 budget before the end of the year.

The budget procedure is always a fairly tortuous affair, and this year has been no exception. We have had to be flexible in responding to major developments in eastern Europe, Germany and the Gulf. Equally, as a substantial net contributor, we have had to be firm in insisting that strict budget discipline is preserved. We shall continue to do so.

At the intergovernmental conference starting next week on institutional reform, we shall press hard for changes to the treaty which will intesify the war against fraud, deepen scrutiny of spending and require ever better value for the money supplied by tax payers and spent by the Community.

5.26 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I am glad to see the Financial Secretary still firmly in place—apparently the only fixed point in a whirling Treasury team.

First, I must make my usual complaint about the quality of the information presented to hon. Members on complex issues concerning the European Community budget. The Treasury's explanatory memoranda do not actually explain very much. The overall figures are set out rather better than they were a year ago, but the notes do not tell us much about the detailed discussions and negotiations that have taken place or about what has happened on the detailed items of each programme in the budget. It is difficult, to say the least, to find one's way from one document to another, and the format used by the Treasury does not help. I hope that the Government will continue to examine ways in which the presentation of information to the House can be improved. The Government must be accountable for what they are up to in the Council of Ministers and the information is crucial if the House is to do the job of scrutiny that it is supposed to perform.

We still do not have before us the Council's response to the European Parliament's budget. We do not have the

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Council's detailed decisions about the various items in the European Parliament's amendments and, given that the Council's response is so crucial to the European Community's budgetary process, it is rather difficult for us to take an accurate snapshot of the present state of the discussions on and the development of the EC budget. I shall return to that point in a moment, because I have a number of specific items to raise with the Government.

When we reach this stage in the discussions next year, I trust that the Treasury—by then, I hope, under the control of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—will be able to present us with an account of exactly what has happened in the Council's response to the Parliament. It would be useful for us to know that.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Even if we had all the information that we should, what power would the House have to make any changes?

Mr. Smith: The House certainly has the power that it should have, which is to scrutinise what the Government are up to, because the Government and Ministers are our representatives in the Council. We need to know what decisions the Council is taking, when it takes them and what measures it is proposing so that we can hold Ministers to account for what they are up to.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Surely all we need to know is that three quarters of the budget goes on agricultural subsidy, which costs every average family in this country £1,000 a year, or £20 a week. Those are the most salient points. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that figure needs to be reduced? What would he do if he were to take over the Treasury team with his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)?

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has woken up to join in our debate. There is much of importance in the documents, not just the item on agriculture. I shall refer to the item on agriculture in a moment. I happen to believe that it takes too great a share of the European Community budget and that we would like to see that share reducing over time. I said that last year, and I will continue to say it. There is much else that we need to scrutinise as well.

One small but important technical point that I need to raise with the Government was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) when he raised the obvious layman's question about what the figures are in pounds rather than in ecus. The Government, in all the figures that they have put before us, have used the conversion rate of the pound to the ecu of 1·435, which assumes that the pound is at its central rate within the exchange rate mechanism.

We all know, however, that the pound is currently substantially below its central rate within the exchange rate mechanism, which means that the calculation that the Government are currently using for the exchange rate between the pound and the ecu is incorrect. The pound is at a lower value than it was when the documents were drawn up. Obviously, one question that we must ask the Government is how much extra, in terms of our own contribution to the budget, the lower standing of the pound as against the ecu will cost us as a result of those exchange rate fluctuations.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I do not want to disturb his flow too much, but with regard to his point about conversion, he mentioned the ERM central rate of £1 to 1·435 ecu, which is in volume 7, document 8182/90. When I looked at the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, which accompanies the documents, I noticed that the conversion rate in that report is £1 to 1·387557 ecu. To which figure are we supposed to pay more attention?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend points exactly to the problem that I identified. The figure in that Select Committee report was used some months ago, before our entry into the exchange rate mechanism. I presume that the Select Committee took the actual rate of conversion at the time it drew up its report. The Government are now taking a theoretical rate of conversion in terms of our central rate within the exchange rate mechanism rather than the actual rate of conversion as of today.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Would not the simple answer be to talk of the good old British pound so that we all would know where we are? It is nonsense and gobbledegook to talk about ecus in the British House of Commons.

Mr. Smith: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not usually have much sympathy with what he says, but he has a valid point. In dealing with such matters, it would be useful if we could perhaps refer to ecus and pounds so that everyone can know exactly where we stand and what we are talking about.

Mr. Maude: It comes a little ill from the hon. Gentleman to sympathise with the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) for the good old British pound. As I understand Labour Members' recent pronouncements about their proposals for economic and monetary union, they would like to get rid of the pound altogether.

Mr. Smith: All the issues about economic and monetary union and the possibility of a single currency stand in the background of many of our discussions in the House. I shall refer to that matter in a moment or two.

In the meantime, the detail of the draft budget is important. One feature of the draft budget is certainly welcome, and that is that the agricultural support section 1 vote is well within the financial perspective by a considerable margin. It still, however, takes the lion's share of the Community budget. Over time, as I have mentioned, we would wish to see that pattern change. Much will depend on precisely what happens in the current round of general agreement on tariffs on trade discussions. None the less, the balance within the European Community budget between support for agriculture, which takes such an overwhelming proportion, and all the other social, regional and structural programmes in the European Community must change over time. We shall support that position.

Any increase in the agricultural support figures required to provide support for the new German länder which have joined Germany from the former East Germany must come within the existing financial

perspective ceiling. It is possible to accommodate that within the existing ceiling. The financial perspective must not be amended to take account of that change.

We should also welcome within the draft budget the agreement that seems to have been reached between the Council and the Parliament to establish an environment fund. Even if it is at a very token level at this stage, it is none the less a small step in the right direction and, I hope, something that can be built on in future.

Elsewhere in the draft budget, however, the news is not so good, and it would be useful to know what part our Government have played in drawing up the response from the Council of Ministers to many of the proposals that have been made by the European Parliament. As I understand it—we do not have the papers in front of us, so I have been able to find this out only by direct contact with colleagues in the European Parliament—the European Parliament has made a range of proposals for spending, which is extremely valuable spending from our point of view, and it seems that the Council of Ministers has rejected them or has demanded cuts. It would be useful to know what role our Government and our representatives in the Council of Ministers have played in some of those decisions.

Let us consider, for example, item 3531 relating to controls, studies and analyses in connection with the fight against fraud, something about which the Government said that they were extremely concerned when we debated the Court of Auditors report some months ago. The Council is proposing a cut of 631,000 ecu in that budget. Item A354, on computerised customs networks for fraud prevention, which is a similarly important issue, is faced with a cut of 200,000 ecu. A cut of 13 million ecu in commitments and 10 million ecu in payments is being proposed in the financial support for transport infrastructure projects within the Community.

In item B3105, on the Lingua project, which is an extremely important educational programme for the children in our schools, the Council is proposing a cut of 2 million ecu. In item B34000, on industrial relations, the Council is proposing a cut of 1·1 million ecu. On measures to combat poverty, item B34103, the Council is proposing cuts of 2 million ecu.

Following some of the Government's statements, we had assumed that environmental concerns would be one of their priorities, but a cut of 2·68 million ecu is to be made in the budget of item B43043, on action to combat pollution caused by waste products. On item B5105, dealing with product safety measures, a cut of 500,000 ecu is being made. In item B75010, which deals with support for the Third world and the Community's contribution to the projects of non-governmental organisations, a cut of 13 million ecu is being proposed in commitments and of 7 million ecu in payments.

Those are just some of the decisions which, as far as I can establish, have been taken by the Council in relation to the proposals of the European Parliament. In some cases, they take the position back to worse than it was when the first preliminary draft budget was proposed. Surely we should know what our Government have been up to when participating in those decisions?

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): As the United Kingdom is one of the largest net payers into the Community, surely we should be pleased that there have been certain economies. Although they have been described as cuts, they are probably economies because, once the legislation is under way with seedcorn money to launch the projects, it does not necessarily follow that spending on those areas should always increase. We have probably been successful in some of those areas and will not need as much money for them in the following year. To describe the proposals as cuts is probably incorrect. They are reductions, not cuts.

Mr. Smith: I am amazed at the hon. Gentleman, who appears to think that we currently have perfect safeguards against fraud in the Community, that our transport infrastructure is absolutely up to scratch and needs no support, that we have solved every problem relating to product safety across the Community, and that charities and voluntary organisations working in the Third world need very little support. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman reaches those conclusions. My colleagues and I do not share those views.

Mr. Maude: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could therefore tell us which of those programmes he knows anything about, other than their titles which he has read out; which ones he would agree to; what the total cost of those increases would be; and the resulting addition to our net contribution to the budget.

Mr. Smith: I am happy to tell the Minister that I would not necessarily agree to a considerable number of the items in the budget of the European Parliament. We certainly share the aim of wishing to go through the budget carefully, to look at it item by item and programme by programme, to see where funds can usefully be directed and where they cannot. Any sensible Government would need to undertake that process. However, there are a number of extremely useful projects which need to be undertaken and I have drawn attention to some of them. I have taken the trouble to go into them in some detail simply to raise those areas of concern.

There are two other areas of concern——

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall give way for the last time, because I have been very generous in giving way.

Mr. Howells: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I have listened with interest to what he has been saying. If I understood him correctly, he said earlier that he was very much in favour of cutting farm subsidies. What type of policy will he and his party pursue to ensure that family farms in Britain will survive without any support of any kind?

Mr. Smith: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman misheard—perhaps deliberately. I did not at any stage say that we wished to cut farm subsidies. I said that we wished to redress the balance within the European Community budget and to see a reducing proportion of that budget being devoted to agricultural support, and an increasing proportion being used for support for the regions and for social policy. That has been the clear position of my party for many a long year, and it is one to which we still subscribe.

We need to raise two other areas of concern with the Government. I should like to know where the funds are coming from for the aid that has been promised to the front-line Gulf states, and for Germany's unification costs.

[Mr. Smith]

I understand that there is a debate under way at the moment between the Council and the Parliament about whether those items can be contained within the existing financial perspective. I understand that the European Parliament is insisting that a revision to the financial perspective may well be required. The Council seems to think otherwise.

I believe that earlier today—it may have been yesterday—ambassadors met under the Italian presidency to discuss whether a proposed revision to the financial perspectives for those two items would be required. I also understand that the United Kingdom representative at the meeting voted against any revision. If that is the case and my information is correct, we need to ask the Government where they believe that the funds for those two commitments will come from because, over time, they may be quite expensive. It would be useful to know the reasoning behind the Government's decision to instruct their representative—as they must have done—to cast our vote in that way at that ambassador-level meeting.

My next point is, in some ways, the most important point about the budget. We must recognise the crucial importance of regional policy in the European Community. In that respect, item 2 of the budget headings—dealing with the structural funds—will take on an ever-increasing importance. We are delighted to see an increased commitment in the 1991 European budget for the structural funds used to enhance development in the less wealthy regions of the Community. It is part of a four-year process of doubling the structure funds, which we welcome. However, we would want to go further.

As the European economy becomes increasingly co-ordinated, regional policy will be ever more important. That will be especially true if we move towards economic and monetary union with a single currency and a common monetary policy. In such circumstances, an absolutely essential requirement would be a strong regional policy to help to redress imbalances between different parts of Europe. That view is shared by the overwhelming majority of our European partners. We do not want a Europe divided between rich and poor regions or rich and poor citizens, but that is the clear danger if we leave everything to the operation of the market. Regional policy and an enhancement of the structural funds are crucial if we are to achieve genuine economic and social cohesion across the Community.

Meanwhile, the British Government, even in their new clothes, remain virtually the only people who do not share that view. They denigrate a regional policy approach at every opportunity. They believe that the market will do it all, but it will not. The Labour party sets a key priority on the development of a European regional policy and wishes to discuss that issue constructively with its European colleagues at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way, because I am drawing my remarks to a close.

If we are to consider what the Government have actually said about regional policy, it is worth going back to an historic document dated November 1989—just 12 months ago—entitled: "An Evolutionary Approach to Economic and Monetary Union." The document is pre-history and even pre-hard ecu. It was the "12 competing currencies—the Nigel Lawson scheme", brought forward by the Government with a fanfare of trumpets. Its relatively brief discourse makes some interesting points, the most important and perhaps the most tragic of which relates to regional policy. It notes the doubling of structural funds by 1992, intended to help reduce regional disparity, but continues, in a classic sentence:

"But regional disparities will be alleviated primarily through the operation of the market."

That is the Government's belief.

In some respects I am pleased to see the Financial Secretary nodding his head, because it makes it crystal clear that the Government have not changed their spots one iota as a result of recent changes. They believe that economic inequalities will be realistically redressed only through market operation—*[Interruption.]* The Financial Secretary seems to have changed his mind—I give way to him.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what he read out and the word that he missed in his earlier caricature—the word "primarily."

Mr. Smith: I am happy to reinstate the word "primarily", because it means that the Government simply see the market operation as the main focus of their approach. It is quite clear that they believe that regional disparities will be redressed primarily through the operation of the market. We believe that those disparities will be redressed primarily by having a strong, sensible, secure regional policy, which we want to put in place. The budget goes some way towards achieving that end, and most of our European partners agree with us, rather than the Government. I look forward to the day when a Labour Government will see that regional policy fully and properly in place.

5.55 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I beg to move, at the end of the Question to add:

"notes with concern the further substantial increases proposed in agricultural spending under the headings EAGGF Guarantee, EAGGF Guidance and Agriculture, and expresses astonishment at the proposals by the European Parliament that these figures should be further increased.".

The amendment expresses my hon. Friends' deep concern at the agricultural spending element in the European Community budget. It was selected for debate by Mr. Speaker at a timely moment. In an ordinary year, the issue of how many ecus the EC budget spends on agricultural subsidies might seem to many to be an archane and academic subject, but this year is different. As the House knows, the Uruguay round of negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade is stalling on the issue, which is so contentious that last night there was rioting in the streets of Brussels. That trouble may yet be the harbinger of worse worries still to come.

We are discussing the topic against not just a background of a five-minutes-to-midnight crisis in world trade talks, but a looming catastrophe in world trade. The word "catastrophe" is justified because it would be a catastrophe if, as expected, the GATT era, which has done so much for the prosperity of the world, flounders and sinks on the rock of EC agricultural subsidies and the world is thrown back into the dark ages of protectionism and trade wars. Those conditions of protectionism created

the slump in world trade of the 1930s, symbolised here in Britain by the Jarrow marches. The spectre of falling living standards and, in some parts of the world, poverty and starvation, will loom again if the EC and other Governments fail to tackle the problem of billowing agricultural subsidies.

To call the EC level of agricultural spending on subsidies "billowing" is far too polite. The common agricultural policy has blown Europe off course into a fool's paradise of extravagant and excessive agricultural spending. The average European family of four now spends £17 a week on subsidising agriculture. Some two thirds of the European Community's £40 billion budget now goes to subsidise farmers, who do not seem particularly content with the results of the bountiful munificence conferred on them.

No end to the problem is in sight. The United States and the rest of the world, as symbolised by the Cairns group in the GATT talks are right to be critical of our failure to tackle agricultural subsidies in a meaningful way. My hon. Friend the Minister said, as he was bound to do, that this year at least the agricultural guideline spending figures had not been breached by the Community. But in 1991, as he was fair enough to say, those guidelines are likely to be breached and the story of overspending is likely to be with us again.

The CAP reforms of the 1980s were not really reforms, but merely cosmetic improvements. After seven years of ineffective tinkering with the CAP we still have a far too high price support level, far too much interference in the domestic market and too much subsidised dumping of the resulting surplus on the international export market. The cost of that folly to the British or the European consumer is painfully expensive. I wonder how many families in this country know that their pocket books are being hit to the tune of £17 a week for agricultural spending.

Subsidies distort and artificially inflate the price of land, encourage intensive farming methods which damage the land and sometimes involve mistreatment of animals. Under the extraordinarily lax EC system, the subsidies often end up in the pockets of fiddlers, fraudsters and cheats, rather than genuine farmers. The small 3 per cent. of the European population who work in farming are not noticeably prosperous. It is a long time since any of us with farming constituents talked to a happy farmer, and the same is true on the continent. Now these agricultural subsidies have brought us to the edge of the greatest crisis in world trade since the 1930s. So something is going seriously wrong, and one wonders whether anyone in the European Commission is listening seriously to this litany of justified complaints.

The answer seems to be that the Commission is not listening seriously enough. It displays a negative attitude which speaks volumes for the political clout of French and German farmers. I hope that, at least in Germany, those attitudes will change following the German elections, but I have my doubts.

America, the Third world and all the nations of the world are now lined up against the European Commission and the European Community. Their demand—it is a negotiating position, of course—is that the EC should cut farm subsidies by 90 per cent. The EC response has been to offer a cut of 30 per cent. If that were a genuine figure, it might be a step—albeit a small step—in the right direction. It would not be bad news if we could save £5 or £6 a week for the average British consumer. There would then be some hope of Third-world and east European producers being able to start selling their goods on world markets at real prices.

The European Commission's response, however, has been phoney. The small print of the EC reply to the GATT negotiators says that half the 30 per cent. cut in subsidies has already been achieved, apparently without anyone noticing, and that EC farmers will be compensated with other subsidies for reductions in subsidy resulting from the GATT talks. The EC document concerned reads:

"The Commission will propose measures to compensate for losses that the liberalisation of agricultural trade will cause to farmers' incomes".

In plain language, that means that whatever subsidies are reduced on the GATT swings will be increased again on the Commission's roundabouts.

The European parliamentarians seem perfectly happy to go along with this folly—to give the nod to this series of jolly backhanders. Indeed, they want to increase spending on subsidies. Our amendment draws attention to the increase in the EAGGF guarantees and guidance proposed by the European Parliament—it expresses astonishment at them. When European parliamentarians are asked what they did in the great trade war in years to come, they will say, "We stoked it up. We proposed an increase of 16 per cent." These MEPs will soon discover that a fool's paradise can be the anteroom to a fool's hell. All hell will break out if GATT breaks down, as I now think it will, and we will be back to the dark ages of protectionism, trade wars, hardship and starvation.

We must get back to fundamentals and recognise that today's farm policies in the EEC were created at a time when the Commission was erroneously predicting world food shortages. When I campaigned for a yes vote in the 1976 referendum, the arguments of almost all those in favour of staying in the Community included the cry that we should stay in because we needed access to adequate food supplies.

Now it is clear that all this was a charade. There never were going to be shortages of agricultural or food supplies. We live in a world of agricultural abundance. Hunger is caused by inefficiency and poverty, not by scarcity or inability to produce. Over-production is the problem. Sooner or later, we must grasp the nettle and set farmers free. We must give them the basic economic freedom to produce what they want, using whatever technologies they want, and to sell their produce freely at home or overseas at the prices they can get for it.

That would be a revolution—uncomfortable, but no worse than the original GATT revolution when manufacturing industry was set free—to the great benefit of world trade and prosperity. Of course the revolution could not be effected overnight. There would have to be a crawling-peg phase-out of agricultural subsidies over several years and special arrangements for small family farmers and hill farmers. There would be a lot of political trouble, but Europe must put its agricultural house in order.

The Government have a good record of pushing for these reforms. I noted that my hon. Friend the Minister said that it will be essential to resist further increases in agricultural spending. He avoided saying how he would resist them, but we shall be glad to take his word for that, just as we take at face value statements supporting the GATT negotiations from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend join me and others in calling on the United States at least to reduce and possibly even to abolish its internal deficiency payment support system, which forms the bulk of United States internal support arrangements?

Mr. Aitken: I agree that the United States does not have clean hands in this matter and that it, too, must deal with its enormous subsidies. There have been some signs in the negotiations that it is willing to do that. At least America has someone with whom to negotiate seriously. The United States has sided with the Third world producers——

Mr. Dykes: The difference is that the United States is siding with the Third world and others in respect of the export refund system but not of the internal support payment system.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is right, but it is good to support reforms of export subsidies on prices. So far, Britain alone in Europe has been a good European and a good internationalist in this matter. We have been pressing for change, and I applaud the stand that our Government have taken thus far, which is why I shall advise my hon. Friends not to vote against the Government on this amendment, important though it is and correct though its terms are.

The Commission is fiddling around with the treaty of Rome while the GATT talks burn, seeming to regard it as a higher priority to hold inter-governmental conferences on political and economic and monetary union while neglecting these more vital issues. If the amendment does nothing else, it will concentrate the eyes of the House, as the eyes of the world are concentrated, on the serious crisis in GATT which will blow up into a catastrophe unless Europe starts to put its agricultural house in order along the lines that I have suggested.

6.6 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I have some sympathy with the points made by the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), although his amendment is rather wimpish. If it had really encapsulated his genuine anger, it would have been couched in stronger language.

I shall not delay the House long because we have only until 7 pm to discuss this important series of budget proposals. I went and collected my papers on them from the Vote Office; any documents that come in such great quantities must contain information of some value, but having to get through them all in a two-hour debate makes a mockery of the procedures of this House, of the EC budget and of the way in which it is discussed by those who are supposed to have some influence on or control over what takes place.

It is virtually impossible to understand the subject of this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) talked about presentation. I asked the Minister a genuine question because I had become confused about what budget we were considering. I see at least two figures for the 1991 budget: one of 55,472 mecu and one of 59,384 mecu. I am assured by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who knows a great deal more about these matters than I do, that there are draft preliminary budgets, preliminary budgets, final budgets and all sorts of others, and I do not know which one we are discussing this evening.

I am not sure either which conversion rate we are using, which is why I asked the Minister whether we were using the rate of £1 to 1·387 ecu—the figure given by the Select Committee on European Legislation—or the rate of £1 to 1·435 ecu—the figure that the Government use. According to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, the latter rate does not exist anyway—it is all nonsense.

The common agricultural policy is making a mockery of the EC and reducing it to the level of the absurd. I was not able to follow the figures given by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) because, when I looked at the budget, it seemed that the amounts allocated to the CAP worked out at about 56 per cent. of the total, whereas the hon. Gentleman said that it was two thirds.

Mr. Butcher: I listened with great interest when the hon. Gentleman asked for the figures to be provided in pounds. Does he think that he has been well served by his Front-Bench spokesmen on the matter of European monetary union, which, if followed to its logical conclusion, will mean that the pound will go? Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to test his Front-Bench spokesmen on what yesterday's statement means for the future of the pound?

Mr. Banks: I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for not realising that I am a Front Bencher. I do not brag about that outside because careerism is not looked upon with great affection by the London Labour movement. I am quite satisfied with the explanations given in the debate by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. This is a complicated matter.

I have said that I look forward to the day when we have a federal Europe with only one currency, one European Government, one President, one Chancellor and so on. I should add that that is not Opposition Front-Bench policy. Nothing that my Front-Bench colleagues have said in the debate frightens or worries me. We have a long way to go. The common agricultural policy is at the centre of our debate and it is making nonsense of the whole European movement. It reduces it to a sordid, silly and scandalous level. Until we get rid of the CAP and the nonsense that it encapsulates, the whole concept of Europe and the EEC will be ridiculed all over Britain.

6.11 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): We should realise that the common agricultural policy was wrong from the beginning. I campaigned against entry to Europe and I warned the farmers in my Province about what would happen. It has happened. Northern Ireland had a prosperous agricultural community. What happened to it? We were not allowed to purchase at reasonable prices feedingstuffs on the world market and as a result we lost two thirds of our laying fowl and two thirds of our pig industry. The whole system is catching up on us and we are beginning to see where we are going. I am a Member of the European Parliament and I can tell the House that there is only one common policy in Europe—the common agricultural policy. That is why there is such a rage to pour money into it.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): There is also the common fisheries policy. When the hon. Gentleman warned his farmers about the dangers of the CAP, did he also warn fishermen in his Province about the

dangers inherent in the common fisheries policy? Does he agree that the interests of fishermen seem to be disregarded by the decision makers in Brussels?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy are tied together.

I warned our fishermen about what would happen. It has happened and will continue to happen unless we apply the brakes. However, the House cannot apply the brakes. I asked an Opposition spokesman to tell me what power we had. He said that we could scrutinise what Ministers do in Europe. Our Ministers can fight with all their might but when the votes are cast the majority in Europe will be against them. There is no point in hon. Members hammering Ministers, because Ministers have no power in Europe. The House needs more than scrutinising power. It needs real power so that it can call a halt.

Our farmers were encouraged to spend vast sums on dairy farming and beef production. Now they are penalised because they did what the Common Market told them to do. They cannot now be told that their subsidies will have to go. I am totally against farmers resorting to violence, but I understand how they feel. They did what the Common Market told them to do—produce, produce, produce—but they did it too well and now they are being penalised.

If we are to unshackle ourselves, we must formulate a policy that will help farmers in the interim. Farmers would be glad to be free, but to bring about that freedom, we must have a reasonable policy and neither the Government nor the Opposition have said anything about that. I recently pressed Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on how to help farmers. There does not seem to be a policy on that.

The backcloth to Europe is monetary and political union. I was amazed at some of the statements about the former Prime Minister. Our local newspaper on Saturday stated:

"The head of Germany's central bank said yesterday Mrs. Thatcher 'was absolutely right' in warning that EC monetary union would weaken sovereignty.

And he told Common Market countries they should take heed. The Bundesbank president . . . told the Stockholm School of Economics: 'As a matter of fact monetary union means a loss of sovereignty'.

Common Market states must be careful to avoid what happened with German reunification. There monetary union forced political union, he said."

That is the head of the central bank and not the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) speaking. We should heed that warning and find a way to free ourselves from the shackles and set the farmers and the fishermen free.

No one knows more about fishermen who ply their trade off the coast of Ulster than I do, and I know how they feel. They see their trade being taken from them and there is nothing that they can do about it. We should face that. It is ridiculous that this British House of Commons has just two hours on a Tuesday afternoon to decide such an issue. That is the sorry pass to which the European Community has brought us.

6.18 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I agree only with the latter part of the speech by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), when he spoke about us having so little time to discuss this matter. I am not a member of the Stockholm school of economics, but I appreciated the election address by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who seems to want to be the next President of the European Community.

There are several matters to be discussed and we have a short time in which to do it. The key issues in the debate are the parts of the budget that are clearly being cut, the direction of aid to eastern Europe, the assistance to front-line states in the Gulf, budgetary control and the budget in the wider context of European Community developments. Expenditure on agriculture seems to be dominating the debate. I understand why that is so, and I shall return to the matter.

It is clear from the Treasury's explanatory memo of 30 November that the European Parliament wants to spend more than the Budget Council. The differences arise because the Council has rejected the Parliament's amendments on research and has agreed only to token entries for the PERIFRA and like projects that are regional and environmental. Because of that, they are both extremely important.

We want to support the European Parliament's decision in those matters, but as it has little power, we must give it more power. Moreover, as its programmes are less than its financial perspective, budget rectitude appears to be being maintained. I cannot go into as much detail as I should like, but I regret that the preliminary draft budget for exchanges of young workers is being cut. I should have thought that it would be highly desirable to continue that, to obtain a greater understanding among the peoples of Europe.

There are also cuts in the Youth for Europe programme. The proposed cut in the PDB for that programme is 2·5 million ecu and, as with the proposed cut in the programme of exchanges of young workers, the European Parliament is trying to reverse that cut. Despite the importance of training young people, it has not been able to do so. Measures for disabled people are also to be cut, and that is extremely regrettable in this day and age, when social conditions for disabled people are improving. They should be able to obtain the necessary resources for a better quality of life.

There are other aspects of the programme—for example, support to eastern Europe is extremely important—but the two major aspects are agriculture and additionality. Quite rightly, many of us have been lobbied this afternoon about the latter by the Coalfield Communities Campaign. I listened with care to the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) speaking about the agriculture budget and the CAP. However, as the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, the CAP is the only common policy that the European Commmunity has ever had. If there were other policies, there might be greater bargaining powers. By default, the European Community has not fashioned other policies, although it has had plenty of opportunity to do so over the past 15 years. I regret that, because we need other European policies to balance the CAP.

Many crocodile tears have been shed this evening about the CAP. I noted the comparison that the hon. Member for Thanet, South made with the deficiency payment system operating in the United States, which gives a great deal of support. The Americans have come to the GATT round negotiations with proposals for a 75 per cent. cut in subsidies, but that has yet to be debated by Congress. It is by no means certain that Congress will accede to such a

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

cut. Given the pork barrel politics of the mid-west and the farmers there, I doubt that it will go along with the 75 per cent. cut.

The post-war systems of support for agriculture in the United States, Canada and other countries, and in this country after the Agriculture Act 1947, and the CAP itself show that support for agriculture is a primary objective for all western Governments. Are we serious in wanting an overnight dismantling of those systems, with all that that will mean for agricultural communities? That life support system cannot be taken away from them all of a sudden.

We are all in favour of the liberalisation of trade and of GATT, but the reality is not as simple as that. There are grave distortions of trade on world markets. For example, one sees few Japanese cars in France, and few British cars in Japan. Great barriers need to be taken down, and it will take a long time to achieve that.

Our agriculture is in serious trouble. In the GATT round, a 30 per cent. cut has been proposed for European Community support, but Britain has been making cuts in support since 1984. Now, in 1990, we have the lowest farm incomes in real terms since 1945. That compares with the circumstances that made it necessary to introduce the Agriculture Act 1947 to support agriculture.

Farmers in my constituency are going bankrupt, and many young farmers are selling off their stock and letting their land. It is all very well to discuss matters of world trade and support systems in an academic manner, but farmers are suffering grievously and many of them will not survive the next 18 months. The matter must be treated seriously. If we are to readjust, we must bring into balance supply and demand in food, as that will even up the pricing system. We cannot let rip the market in agricultural products, because the market will not support our agriculture. European farmers demonstrated in Brussels and Japanese and American farmers demonstrated there, too, because their family farms will go under as a result of the GATT round.

World trade must be liberalised, but that cannot be achieved overnight and agriculture must continue to have support systems. I am thinking in particular of the family units not only in Wales but in Britain, the European Community and worldwide. There will be grave social unrest without a commitment to support systems. The planning of the CAP needs to be readjusted and its funding must be better directed to the family farming units that require support. There is undoubtedly wastage within the CAP, but that does not mean that we should abolish it. Without such better direction of funds, I fear for the future of our agriculture.

6.27 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I gave an undertaking that I would not detain the House for more than five minutes and I shall endeavour to discharge that undertaking.

This debate, coupled with the deliberations of the House on European monetary union and on the social and regional fund assistance, which have been linked to the debate by the Labour party, is of key importance. It is no exaggeration to say that the debate about European monetary union is probably the biggest economic question as well as the biggest constitutional question that the House has faced since 1945.

Thus far, the House has tried to conduct the debate in an open and candid fashion. I hope that Labour Members will not think me too provocative if I point out that, hitherto, Labour Members have been able to lie back and watch the debate raging on the Government Benches, because they are putting together their policy documents —documents that will eventually surface in a manifesto that they will put before the public. I implore Labour Members to be a little more forthcoming than they were until yesterday. Yesterday, if I am interpreting the remarks of one of their Front Benchers properly, they attempted to outbid the Government in their enthusiasm for progression towards European monetary union.

I listened carefully to the Treasury shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He appeared to say that there was a quid pro quo for the Labour party's resolute commitment to European monetary union—that a future Labour Government would argue for a major increase in regional fund expenditure and assistance to the poorer regions. Presumably that includes the poorer regions of Britain.

That is an awful attempt to sell the parliamentary Labour party an utterly false prospectus. There are only three contributors to the fund—Germany, France and the United Kingdom. One of them, Germany, has plenty to do in funding a £150 billion programme—which is tantamount to a huge welfare programme—for its cousins and other relatives in the eastern provinces of the new federal republic. The key paymaster of that fund is in no position to consider either increases in or additional takes from countries such as the United Kingdom, let alone Greece, Spain, Portugal and others. If the Labour party is arguing that it will go for full-blown EMU—which it appears to be doing—on the basis that it will get back resources from the Commission, it is misleading its supporters in the House.

It is ironic that we are having this debate on regional aid. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury quite literally included it. If the Germans will not pay, and if the French just stand pat—which they usually do—the only people who can increase the payments of the fund are the British. What is the Labour party's argument? Presumably it is that Britain must increase its payments to Europe in order to achieve a bigger payment from the regional fund, in exchange for a loss of sovereignty on our currency and constitutionally—something that most members of the Labour party, both rank and file and in this House, would find unacceptable. What a way to run a debate on the biggest question facing this country since 1945.

I have made my views on the common agricultural policy clear. There is a dangerous threat to the GATT round. I am not a socialist, but I have argued in some two dozen Council of Ministers meetings in Europe for the interests of the third world and the poorer countries in their trading relationships with the EEC. I have argued for the Lomé countries. If we do not achieve a clear position on a free-trading, open-looking Europe, with zero barriers, our arguments on aid programmes to help those poorer countries will be academic and meaningless. There will be a huge lacuna in the logic that we have deployed to get to that protectionist position in Europe.

Hitherto, the real debate may have taken place on only one side of the Chamber. As of yesterday, the real debate appears to be beginning on the other side, the Opposition side. I hope that this House will be accorded the privilege of a free vote on these issues. It has been argued elsewhere that there should even be a referendum. I sincerely hope that the House will do its fellow EEC members the courtesy of candid information and an open and honest debate on this question.

6.34 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I shall follow the fine example set by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) and make only a brief intervention.

I part company with the hon. Gentleman in his criticism of the role of the parliamentary Labour party in the debate. The major defining characteristic of debates on critical matters such as this is the lack of interest displayed by so many hon. Members on both sides of the House. A few moments ago, when we debated the decision of the President of the European Court of Justice on the Merchant Shipping Act 1988—an important decision concerning the constitutional position of this Parliament—there were fewer than 18 hon. Members in the Chamber. That is characteristic of this place—an appalling and near-fatal lack of interest in what is taking place within the European Community of 12 nations.

I agree with much of what has been said about the disastrous common agricultural policy. It has damaged, and continues severely to damage, the very structure of the European Community. I hold a similar view on the common fisheries policy. That so-called common policy is falling into even further disrepute in our fishing communities.

The plain fact is that the European Community fishing fleet is too big for the stocks upon which it depends. The fleet must be severely reduced, especially in the United Kingdom. According to the multi-annual guidance programme, our fleet must suffer a reduction of between 30 and 40 per cent. before the end of 1991. If that sort of reduction must be inflicted upon our fishing fleet and our fishermen, and on those who find their work in that indigenous industry, it must be done humanely. There must be a decommissioning scheme, both in this country and in the littoral states of the European Community, that will allow fishermen to avoid the terrible fate of being driven ashore and into bankruptcy.

We are talking not only of people being put out of work but of small coastal communities, located hundreds of miles from Brussels—indeed, hundreds of miles from London—that will wither away. The only beneficiaries will be the people looking for holiday homes in our picturesque fishing villages.

Mr. Gill: I respect the hon. Gentleman's views on the fishing industry. Is it not ironic that the position in the fishing industry that he is describing has come about despite many programmes of aid to assist with the building of new vessels, all with the aim of improving the marketing and production of the product? Is that not symptomatic of what will happen to all the industries affected by structural funds? Despite all the benefits that are supposed to flow from the introduction of structural funds, it all appears to end in tears.

Dr. Godman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I blame both Conservative and Labour Administrations. While we have had to face up to those MAGP applications, our fishing fleets have grown in size. That is an insane policy, given the fragile nature of stocks, especially those in the North sea. Indeed, off the west coast of Scotland and in the Irish sea, the stocks are equally fragile. We cannot allow them to be overfished, or the small communities will be destroyed. That would be a scandal for the nation and for Parliament.

I hope that I can elicit a response from the Minister on two points. First, it might surprise some hon. Members to know that I am pleased about two elements in the huge document that we have. One, on pages 529 and 530, is the aid programme of 20 million ecus for Romanian orphanages. Will United Kingdom non-governmental organisations be involved in the monitoring of that aid? There has been a deal of press speculation about the somewhat shady characters who have become involved in aid for those young children in such desperate circumstances.

What monitoring will there be, and can we be certain that the aid will go to those young children who so desperately need such assistance? Will the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, which has considerable experience in assisting children caught up in equally tragic circumstances, be involved? Despite the powerlessness of this place in seeking to restrain or influence decisions taken at a strategic level in Brussels, those are important questions for the young children in the Romanian orphanages.

Secondly, I welcome the aid for financial and technical co-operation with Latin American developing countries which is detailed on pages 483 and 484. I have genuine hopes for the establishment of democracies in, for example, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. In El Salvador, the United Nations mediators are playing an important role in bringing guerrillas, the army and the so-called Government to the negotiating table. More aid should be given to those countries, but what discussions have taken place with United Nations officials who are directly concerned with establishing parliamentary democracies in such countries, particularly the three that I have mentioned?

6.42 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): This has been a useful and helpful debate but, as the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) knows, the Opposition Benches are empty because nothing can be done about the massive expenditure of £40,000 million, or about the court decision now affecting his fishermen and others throughout the United Kingdom. Basically, we are utterly powerless. Only if the Minister were to accept the amendment could any good at all come of this debate.

We know that jobs in every constituency will be affected, factories will close and trade will be disrupted if the GATT talks break down. Those talks are breaking down because, sadly, the EC has become the protectionist wrecker of the GATT. Instead of offering some reduction in farm spending, we have offered a bogus formula, which I am sure that the Minister accepts is not a reduction in the farm subsidy at all. Half the alleged 30 per cent. cut in the £23,000 million farm subsidy has, it is claimed, already taken place and the other half will be replaced by other

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

subsidies. The Minister must at least tell the GATT that the United Kingdom recognises that the EC has offered nothing, that that is scandalous and that we will work in any way that we can within the EC to see that there is some meaningful comparison.

Those who think that farm subsidies have not been increasing should look at a parliamentary answer given on 19 October which set out clearly the fact that since the Government came to power agricultural subsidies from the EC have increased by about 260 per cent. and, since we joined the EC, they have increased by about 1,000 per cent. Looking to the future, all the signs are that, in 1991, agricultural spending will go through the roof.

The reasons are obvious. The beef and lamb markets have collapsed, while production has increased. We all know that that is true. In addition, the exchange rate of the dollar has fallen and German unification has imposed extra costs, all of which will add to the FEOGA guarantee commitments. If that happens, the EC will do yet another accountancy fiddle, and then what will the Government do? As the Minister said, in 1987 there was the agreement on strict budgetary controls, but when it came to 1988 an accountancy fraud was perpetrated by means of a metric year. The Minister works hard for us in Europe and I think that he knows that the same thing will happen next year. All the signs are that we will break through the new higher barriers, and the only way that we will be able to cope is through another accountancy fraud.

We should accept that there is no way in which the EC will agree to reform of the CAP. Any thoughts of that should simply be thrown aside. There is not the slightest chance that all the silly talk about new reforms and controls will have any effect. They can simply be overcome by an accountancy fraud, or some other kind of fraud. The Minister knows that fraud exists because the figures given disregard special provisions made for the elimination of surpluses of 1,400 mecu.

What on earth can we do? The Government must start saying what they think about this. That would be a step forward. The next time the EC wants more cash, we shall simply have to say no. That will be the only point at which we shall have any power. Unless we say no, we are completely and utterly powerless.

I hope that the Government will not follow the shameful example of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). This has been a good debate and I agree that most hon. Members have spoken sincerely, but the hon. Gentleman, when asked whether he was in favour of cutting agricultural subsidies, said no, he was just in favour of cutting a proportion and that, if other expenditure was increased, a proportion would be kept.

That is shameful, speaking as the hon. Gentleman does for a party which represents working people and for whom it has fought sincerely and fairly. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself. He should appreciate that people in London are homeless and people elsewhere are starving, while he and his colleagues are agreeing to spend £140 million each and every week on the dumping and destruction of food.

There is nothing that we can do about that dreadful spending, the fraud or the fact that we shall once again break through all the limits while the same old tactics are used, but I hope that hon. Members will realise that what we are doing today will have a nasty effect on jobs. I hope that the Government will start saying clearly that they believe that what is happening to the CAP is shameful, that it helps no one and that they disagree with the CAP proposals and the EC stance in the Uruguay round, which is simply a fraud and a farce, as are so many things to do with the EC.

6.48 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The explanatory memorandum states on page 4 that the Community budget has significant financial and policy implications. That is certainly an understatement. The budget perpetuates the structural funds, the regional development fund, the social fund and not least, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) pointed out, the 30 million ecu to be spent on the agricultural guidance and guarantee fund.

The structural fund has done great harm to both the agricultural and fisheries industries. We have only to look at the end result to know that is so. There is over-production, and mortal damage has been done to traditional family farming. An otherwise efficient industry has been weakened, and serious international antagonism has been created. That is apparent in the current GATT round, and many of us are aware of the damage that has been done to the Third world in the process.

Higher expenditure, lower incomes, and chaos in world markets are the consequence of the structural fund. Does my right hon. Friend accept that fraud is endemic and deep rooted in many budget policies? How many of these budget measures would the Government have taken on their own account? Are the Government satisfied that the functions performed under the budget are not already duplicated by British organisations such as development boards and agencies? How do many of the articles in the budget accord with our political principles of non-intervention and a free market economy?

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): If subsidiarity means anything at all, could not agricultural support be left to national farmers?

Mr. Gill: If subsidiarity is to be made meaningful, the British Government will have to do an enormous amount to make it a reality. I am sad to say that we are at fault in this country in taking to the centre rights and controls that really belong with lower authorities. My hon. Friend makes a good point when he suggests that agricultural support should be repatriated to the United Kingdom, so that we may exercise more control over how our farmers are supported, and have more say in the way in which our intrinsically efficient industry, which can compete not only in the European market but worldwide, should develop. It would be so much easier to make such considerations within our own shores.

The final question that I wish to put to my hon. Friend is whether he recognises in the budget that is before us yet another blueprint for socialism.

6.53 pm

Mr. Maude: This has been a valuable debate, and not one that has taken a party political approach, which is desirable and right. The House properly takes a serious interest in these matters, and I regret that our debate had to be truncated, with rather less than two hours available

to us. The debate was originally meant to last half a day. If there had been fewer bogus points of order from Opposition Members at the beginning, more time would have been available for debate.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked whether there would be monitoring by British non-governmental organisations of support to Romanian orphanages. I cannot provide him with an answer, but I acknowledge his genuine and proper concern, and I shall ensure that he receives a satisfactory reply. The hon. Gentleman asked also about aid to Latin American countries and whether there had been discussions with UN officials concerned with the establishment of democracies. I understand that such discussions have taken place, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer. I shall ensure that my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provide the hon. Gentleman with a reply as soon as possible.

Much of the debate focused on the common agricultural policy. As a Minister, one is always keen to try to draw together the sense of the House and to achieve a consensus. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that the common agricultural policy has not found many friends in the House today. Attitudes have ranged from the very hostile to the fairly hostile, with the possible exception of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), to whose contribution I shall refer later.

Clearly it is undesirable that spending on the CAP should increase further, but clearly it will be difficult to constrain an increase in spending. Equally clearly, we must continue trying to do so, as we have done consistently during our term of office. I am not as despondent as some of my hon. Friends about the prospects of achieving a resolution to the GATT negotiations. I believe that realism will prevail and that there will be a satisfactory outcome. It is of overwhelming importance that there should be. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) warned, the absence of an agreement would lead to a perhaps not so gradual erosion of the multilateral trading arrangements, which would bring impoverishment across the world. There is an enormously heavy burden on those conducting the negotiations to do so in a way that will allow agreement to be reached.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) asked whether I accept that there is fraud in the European Community. Yes, I do. Of course there is fraud in the way in which some of the European Community's money is spent. It is essential that proper action is taken to fight that. I mentioned the budget line of additional funds to fight fraud. The Commission has started to take the problem seriously, and I assure my hon. Friend that the British Government at least will be constantly at hand to ensure that the Commission retains an interest in the fight against fraud.

My hon. Friend asked also whether there is duplication of spending. I believe not, in this country. We do all that we can to avoid duplication. I know from a previous office that I held of my hon. Friend's close interest in subsidiarity, which I am glad that he maintains.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor expressed passing concern about the disproportionate amount of agricultural spending. His solution is that, rather than control agricultural spending, more should be spent on everything else. That thought had an echo in the contribution of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), whose remarks were rather illuminating. He spoke of economic and monetary union, and seemed to believe that it would be all right for Britain to lose the power to take decisions, provided there were huge transfers of resources.

I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that, if there were to be such transfers, they would overwhelmingly be from the United Kingdom to elsewhere. If the hon. Gentleman had understood that—which I doubt—he might well take a different view about whether the proposals constitute a good bargain for the United Kingdom. I do not believe that they do; I believe that they constitute a very bad bargain.

In general, the hon. Gentleman's speech demonstrated an extraordinarily undiscriminating approach to the European Community budget. He read out a list of the European Parliament's proposals to increase spending, all of which had nice cuddly titles. That is all that the hon. Gentleman knew about them: they sounded nice. If that is the Labour party's approach to public spending—if it sounds nice, commit yourself to it and look at the small print later—it is lucky that Labour's chances of being elected are very slight. Its attitude seems to be, "If it sounds nice, buy it; if the European Parliament suggests it, buy it; if the two coincide, we must have it."

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I must now put the Question on the amendment.

Mr. Aitken: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that, as it is now 7 pm, the hon. Gentleman cannot withdraw the amendment. By resolution of the House, I must put the Question.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Order [30 November], to put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 20, Noes 188.

Division No. 17] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Aitken, Jonathan
Body, Sir Richard
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Fry, Peter
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Kilfedder, James
Lewis, Terry
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Moate, Roger
Nellist, Dave
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John

Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Livsey, Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Salmond, Alex
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to the said Order, and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM(90) 121, relating to the Preliminary Draft Budget of the European Communities for 1991, 8182/90 relating to the Draft Budget of the European Communities for 1991, and 9865/90 and the supplementary explanatory memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 30th November 1990, relating to the European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft Budget.

Private Business

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That so much of the Lords Message [12 November] as relates to the Clyde Port Authority Bill, the London Underground (Victoria) Bill, the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Shard Bridge Bill be now considered. *—[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7.12 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to have been called so early in the debate, although I suppose that it reflects the great concern that the Chair, like the Government and the Opposition, has had about the way in which the private Bills that we are debating have come before the House. I shall not rehearse again the variety of arguments that have been adduced in the past— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should be grateful if you would ask hon. Members who are engaged in conversation to come to order. We are concerned with important measures. I am trying to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) is saying, and I would like to hear him in reasonable silence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am grateful to the hon. Member for that helpful intervention, which I feel sure the whole House will take.

Mr. Bell: I will explain briefly why the revival motion on the four Bills with which we are concerned should not be approved. Hon. Members will know that my main concern is the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, although I am sure that other Opposition Members will speak about the other measures that we are debating. There are many reasons why the revival motion should be rejected, one of the main being that we have always argued that the use of the private Bill procedure in this way is a corruption of public Government policy. In other words, because the Government could not find time for the privatisation of the trust ports—because of their crowded programme involving public legislation—they have used the private Bill procedure.

Indeed, they advised the Tees and Hartlepool port authority to take the private Bill route. That advice was given by a former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon). I cannot recall how many Secretaries of State for Transport we have had since that right hon. Gentleman left office, but he originally asked the Tees and Hartlepool port authority to adopt the private Bill procedure and promised that it would be supported in the House. I have no doubt that, to ensure that the revival motion is approved, the payroll vote is hovering in the corridors and tea rooms waiting for the vote to be called.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport was honest when speaking at earlier stages of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. He accepted from the Dispatch Box that the Government did not have time for a public Bill, that a private Bill was the answer and that, for that reason alone, the private Bill route had been chosen. My hon. Friends and I have argued that that procedure is a corruption of our proceedings. Over the years we have seen that corruption entering our proceedings in a sinister way, permitting them to fit in with the Government's programme. That happened with the Associated British Ports Act 1990 and it is happening with the Bills with which we are dealing today.

Such a procedure concerns us greatly, and that is why we are opposing the revival motion. Our opposition is based on our belief that the proceedings of this legislature are being corrupted by the Executive. We are confirmed in that belief by the passage in the recent Queen's Speech saying:

"Legislation will be introduced to privately finance roads; to reform procedures for streetworks; to improve road traffic; to convert trust ports into private companies".

Tonight we are faced with a private Bill the purpose of which is to privatise a port, and the Government have given a legislative commitment in the Queen's Speech to privatise trust ports and convert them into private companies.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): How many trust ports are there, other than the Clyde port authority and the Tees and Hartlepool port authority?

Mr. Bell: I believe that throughout the country there are 36 trust ports. The Government will face the difficulty that when they try to privatise them, they will find that many of them do not have the assets that are available to the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. Like all the other ideological commitments of the Conservatives, when the Government discovered that the trust ports had massive assets—the Tees and Hartlepool port authority's assets total about £58 million—they started by wanting to take 50 per cent. of the assets, with a further percentage being taken by way of capital gains. That is why we must oppose the revival motion.

As I said, I shall not rehearse all the arguments that have been adduced at other stages. This is neither the time nor the place to do that, and while my hon. Friends and I do not cast any aspersions on the Chair, we suggest that the Select Committee on Procedure should examine how we can be debating on the Floor of the House a private Bill when we are faced with a Government commitment in the Queen's Speech to privatise all the trust ports in the land. Considering the way in which our proceedings are being corrupted, we are left hoping that when the new Conservative leadership settles down——

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend says that he will not go over the arguments that have been rehearsed before on this issue. He should not be too reticent about arguing the full case on what is, after all, a fresh motion. It would do no harm to re-state some of the arguments that he used in previous debates. As he said, an important innovation is the reference to the matter in the Queen's Speech. That is relevant to the motion in view of the important step that the Government propose to take through the private Bill procedure. There have been complaints about Government legislation being undertaken through the private Bill procedure. I thought when I read the Queen's Speech that the Government had heeded the representations that had been made repeatedly and at length by Opposition Members. I urge my hon. Friend to examine the issues involved tonight with great care.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend is right. When I read the Queen's Speech, I thought that Opposition Members, and perhaps the Minister, had had some influence on the Government. The Minister has survived a variety of

[Mr. Bell]

changes in Government and in leadership. Perhaps he had a modest role in ensuring that the private Bill procedure would be set aside for an appropriate procedure.

When the subject was raised on 22 October 1990, I drew attention to the contradictions in the methods of floating the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. Mr. Charles Wellington had consistently said that there would be no stock market flotation and that shares would be offered to local pension funds and to the local work force. Opposition Members pointed out that, as the dock labour scheme has been abolished, the work force, sadly, has been diminished. The skills and jobs of many workers who had devoted their lives to the docks have been lost.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill makes no provision for shares for workers. It was agreed in Committee that an appropriate amendment will be moved in the other place, but no figure has been given. The Act to privatise trust ports may contain more generous provisions than the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that in responding to that intervention, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) will bear in mind the fact that we are dealing with a procedural motion. It would not be in order to go into detail on the merits of the Bills that are the subject of the motion.

Mr. Bell: I am trying to stay within the terms of the motion and to resist the blandishments of my hon. Friends to rehearse arguments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who sat on the Committee which considered the Bill, makes an important and valid point—that hon. Members have not been able to debate an amendment that was made in Committee because it goes directly to the other place.

Mr. Barnes: The point that I am making is that another measure will be brought before the House for the privatisation of trust ports generally. That could contain more generous provisions for workers' shares. That is why I thought that the point was relevant to our debate.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) is in some difficulty, but I hope that it is temporary.

Mr. Barnes: He does not have a leg to stand on.

Mr. Bell: He has a leg to stand on, but that has nothing to do with his support for the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill.

Opposition Members have not received an answer to their question about shares for the work force. We have not received an answer to the contradiction in the statements made by Mr. Charles Wellington, the secretary of the authority, and Mr. Hackney, its chief executive, on what will happen to the shares. We cannot pass the motion until we have received answers to those questions.

The Tees and Hartlepool port authority is spending the community's money on a massive publicity campaign to persuade local people that privatisation is in the interests of the local community. That must have cost about £750,000, and I am sure that it will be quaking in its shoes about the possibility of an early election being called and the privatisation being set aside.

We oppose the motion because we have not received answers to our questions. We argued that the Tees and Hartlepool port authority has ample provision in its articles of association to invest locally. Since the Bill's First Reading, the authority has made a series of local investments not in the port but in property. That exercise was futile because under its articles of association it was entitled to make such investment. The private Bill was also a futile exercise. It was a gleam in the eyes of the chief executive and the secretary of the authority, to the detriment of port workers.

I briefly mentioned the possibility of shares being issued to the work force, which has radically altered and reduced as a consequence of the dock labour scheme being abolished. It is not for me to rehearse the arguments, but we have fallen victim of the ideology of the Government, who got rid of the dock labour scheme and who put skilled men on the dole and replaced them with less skilled workers.

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Gentleman will know that I have criticised this privatisation and the port levy. Is his opposition to the motion based on the belief that no form of privatisation of the port authority is acceptable, however much improved and however much revised it is?

Mr. Bell: The trust port principle goes back 200 years. Its purpose was to serve the local community and strengthen the local port. It is the third largest port in the country. The port authority has invested in aviation and property. We have consistently said that its powers are adequate not only for local investment—Nissan uses the port for its exports and imports—but for it to invest elsewhere in the country if that is what it wishes. We cannot see why there should be any privatisation of the port.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I am sure that I do not need to remind the hon. Gentleman, with his knowledge of the City of London, that insufficient money can be raised from income obtained from dues. Money must be raised from the City to invest further and to develop properly, but the Tees and Hartlepool port is prevented from doing so. The only income—it is not allowed to borrow—is its daily income and revenue. That does not give it the scope to develop, as it will, and to bring economic well-being to the Teesside area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the the hon. Member for Middlesbrough will link his remarks to the motion before us.

Mr. Bell: I will ensure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I take your advice to stay on the subject of the motion and the reasons why the House should not vote for it. I do not wish to be led unduly down the path suggested by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh. However, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall answer his question.

The hon. Member for Langbaurgh has taken the argument of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority and turned it round the other way. The authority has said until now that it wants the Bill to be enacted because it has cash of £25 million in the bank which it cannot spend because it cannot find ways of investing that money. The authority

did not need to go to the City of London and it did not need to raise capital on the capital market because it had its own cash mountain. The authority said that it could not invest its money elsewhere because that would be ultra vires. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who is not with us tonight, proved beyond doubt on Second Reading that the authority had ample powers to enable it to invest, so the argument was spurious.

The real reason for the Bill is that the authority originally envisaged a glorified management buy-out. Those at the top of the tree in the authority saw reasons for that. If the debates have done anything, they have removed that concept. We have obliged the authority to expand its so-called "share ownership" to a wider group of people than it had thought necessary. The argument of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh is wrong and, until now, the authority has not put it forward.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Will my hon. Friend clarify whether the practice of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority is different from that of the Clyde port authority? I originally thought that there would be a public flotation along the lines proposed by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). After questioning, I realise that there will be no such flotation. The company is private and the members of the authority will decide who can buy the shares, so people can buy them only by invitation. There will be no question of seeking capital from the City of London; there will be a private invitation for people to have access to the shares. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is what is happening?

Mr. Bell: To use an ancient metaphor, my hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. The Tees and Hartlepool authority had £50 million of assets. Who would value the shares? Mr. Wellington, the secretary, said that a consortium would be set up to buy the port from a trust being formed on privatisation and that it would be a mixture of staff, of management, of local pension funds and of City institutions. He said that the authority would be advised by Rothschild financial advisers. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh wanted the City of London to be involved; it has already been involved through N. V. Rothschild. Later, Mr. Hackney, the chief executive, made it clear that there would be a flotation on the stock market two to three years later.

We are seeking to oppose the motion, yet we still do not know who the shareholders will be, how the shares will be dispensed, who the beneficiaries will be, how much will go to the work force and how much will end up in the City of London. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh seemed to confirm that there is a hidden agenda and that the Tees and Hartlepool authority will get into the hands of the City of London as quickly as it can. It seems that the authority will use the shares to raise money in the City and will then seek to increase its borrowing powers. Why anyone would want to borrow money when we have the Conservatives' high interest rates of 15 per cent., 16 per cent. and even, perhaps, 19 per cent., is beyond me. However, that is the scenario that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh has painted for us.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour's ideology is not our driving force in this matter? Does my hon. Friend agree that we should welcome the motion if the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill was intended simply to allow the trust ports extra powers to carry out their business as trust ports? As a result of the lack of certainty over the issue of shares, it is believed that the trust ports will be subject to a number of high charges. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said in a previous debate, the Government have seen the authority as a lucrative source. That is why we oppose the motion on which my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has outlined his arguments in such relevant detail.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend referred to extra powers. The former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Southend, West told the Tees and Hartlepool port authority that he would not allow legislation to come to the House under which the authority could be given those extra powers. Indeed, he argued that the authority did not need them. He said—and it was all written down—that, as he would not allow such legislation, the authority would have to take the route of privatisation and of the private Bill. That is why we have the motion today. The right hon. Gentleman implied that there would be a Government payroll vote to get a private Bill through the House. The payroll vote, which may have changed slightly over the past few days, is lurking in the corridors of power, waiting to spring when there is a vote on the motion so that the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill can continue in the other place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South has mentioned the variety of ways that the Government have discovered of taking money out of the trust ports. We debated that point when we discussed the Bill previously, so I will not repeat the arguments now. However, once the Government saw that there were assets of £50 million and that there had been grant money to the trust ports in the 1960s, they said in Committee, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) will remember, that they would take 50 per cent. of those assets—£25 million—and would modify the Finance Bill to do so.

In addition, the Government said that, after the 50 per cent. had gone, 27·5 per cent. of the remainder would be taken in capital gains tax, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will remember. In that way, the £50 million of assets of the authority were reduced by some 63·75 per cent. The Government got their hands on more money for the Treasury, but it was, of course, to the detriment of the Tees and Hartlepool area and to those who had invested their lives on the quaysides and at the harbours. That is another reason why we oppose the motion.

The motion is an omnibus edition, which covers the Clyde Port Authority Bill, the Shard Bridge Bill and the London Underground (Victoria) Bill as well as the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. I have no comment to make on the first three Bills but have directed my attention to the fourth.

Mr. Harry Barnes: I presume that my hon. Friend's arguments on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill also apply to the Clyde Port Authority Bill, which proceeded ahead of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. Surely the argument that the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill should not be passed because the Government intend to introduce enabling legislation applies equally to the Clyde Port Authority Bill.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friends will put the arguments on the Clyde Port Authority Bill later in the debate. One reason why we are opposed to the motion is that we do not have the answers to our earlier questions. We have shown clearly that the Tees and Hartlepool port authority had the power to create a host of jobs in construction, in transport, in leisure and in other industries. The motion is simply an extravaganza in the framework of the Government's overall policy. The Government are now contradicting themselves by their own public legislation. We have not had answers to any of our questions and, unless we persist in our opposition, we shall never get the answers. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East heard in Committee that commitments were made for the other place, but those are not of great assistance to us. We must concentrate on the motion tonight.

There has been an election for the leadership of the Conservative party. At least two of the candidates said that there should be a reform of parliamentary procedures. This Government have brought the private Bill procedure into severe disrepute by allowing the Associated British Ports Bill to take the private Bill route, and by doing the same for the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and for the Clyde Port Authority Bill. The sooner we revise our procedures, the better. We shall not then have to use the private Bill procedure to deal with matters that are properly the subject of pubic Bills. We shall not have to debate revival motions such as this, and the House will be a better place, introducing better legislation for the benefit of the public.

7.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I shall intervene but briefly because the motion before us is strictly procedural and my object is therefore simply to advise the House of the Government's view. It is not uncommon for private Bills not to complete all their stages in one Session. I believe that the promoters of such Bills have the right to expect the House to reach a decision on the merits of their proposals and not to have them discounted because of a procedural hazard. The private Bill procedure allows for carry-over and revival motions. The fact that the motion stands in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means shows that he is satisfied that all is in order——

Mr. Worthington: May I ask the Minister about one of the factors that will influence my decision whether to vote for the revival motion? Will the trust ports Bill that the Government are to introduce differ in any way from the Clyde Port Authority Bill and the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill? The Government have changed direction and are to make time available for the privatisation of the trust ports. It is therefore right to ask whether the proposals in their Bill will be similar to those in the private Bills.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to discuss proposals that may come before the House at a later stage. The Government's Bill has not yet been published, so I am not in a position to give the hon. Gentleman a response. He must wait and see.

Mr. Harry Barnes: But there is a problem. We have been told all along that the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill is a pioneering measure. Those who promoted it argued to the Committee that they were at the forefront of developments and that their example would be followed by other trust ports. If the Bill is really a pioneering measure, it will presumably form the framework for the public Bill that is to be introduced.

Mr. McLoughlin: Our object tonight is to reach a decision on a procedural motion in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means. What the House decides in future is a matter for the House. I cannot say whether the public Bill will go through all its stages; the House will have to decide, although I hope that the Bill will receive the support that it so richly deserves.

Dr. Godman: Clause 4(3) of the Clyde Port Authority Bill refers to the privatised company taking on board the obligations of the authority. Will a similar provision be included in the forthcoming public Bill? Will the responsibilities now carried out by the 30 or so trust ports appear in the public Bill? Will the private companies have to fulfil those responsibilities and honour those obligations?

Mr. McLoughlin: I cannot help the hon. Gentleman because we are not discussing what may be in a Bill that we may introduce in due course. The public Bill will go through its Second Reading, Committee and Report stages and the House will then be able to question its contents and the powers contained in it. I repeat that we are here tonight to discuss a procedural motion tabled by the Chairman of Ways and Means.

I should perhaps remind the House that all four Bills were passed by this House before the end of the previous Session.

Mr. Worthington: The matter is most important to the Clyde port authority and, I am sure, to the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. Some Opposition Members are most concerned about the lack of safeguards. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to the powers of the port authorities. I am concerned about the lack of control in respect of the issue and sale of shares under the Clyde Port Authority Bill.

Can the Minister give us an assurance that any safeguards in the Bill that his Department is to introduce will apply to all the port authorities and that safeguards in respect of the ownership of shares will be written into the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Clyde Port Authority Bill? If they are not, the private Bills will be inferior to the public Bill.

Mr. McLoughlin: The private Bills have been through all their stages in the House of Commons. It is up to the House to reach a conclusion on the Bills before it. The hon. Gentleman is asking whether there will be retrospective legislation if a public Bill is passed. He must wait and see. I am not in a position to say one way or the other. I repeat that we must consider the procedural motion before us. If the Bills return from the other place with amendments, the House will have to consider them. That will be the appropriate time at which to discuss those matters.

In principle, the Bills are acceptable to the Department. The London Underground (Victoria) Bill, promoted by London Underground to enable essential safety work to be carried out at Victoria underground station to relieve congestion, has the Government's support. We therefore

support the revival motion. The promoters of the Bills are entitled to a decision based on the Bills' merits rather than having that decision frustrated by procedure. All the Bills are to go to the other place and it is quite right that they should be allowed to be considered further. If the Bills are passed in the other place, we shall have further opportunities to consider them on their merits.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The Minister said that it was right for the Bills to go to the other place. The Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill was introduced following a decision by three men representing the authority. The casting vote of the Chairman decided the matter. Is it right that such a Bill should go to the House of Lords when, as good parliamentarians, we know full well that, in the event of a tie on a serious matter such as this, custom has it that the Chairman should give his casting vote in favour of the status quo?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in his attendance of our debates on the Bills and I have listened to his contributions with interest.

Mr. Leadbitter: But what is the answer?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting point, but he knows that a majority is a majority, whether it be a majority of one or a majority of 100.

Mr. Leadbitter: I am merely seeking clarification. The Minister has always responded with reasonable concern for the questioner. Do we really want to set a precedent when we know—as a matter not of opinion but of evidence—that the decision to privatise was made by three people, and only three, with the Chairman's vote cast in favour of the Bill. The normal practice in the House is for the Chairman to cast his vote in favour of the status quo. When I first became a Chairman, my inexperience led me to vote against the status quo. I got my knuckles rapped. Does the Minister now say that it is all right and that the matter can go to the other place? In fairness, is it not inevitable that the Bill will go to the other place? Surely it is against parliamentary practice for him to say that that is right.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. It is not a Government motion; it is a motion in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means. I am merely expressing the Government's point of view. The Chairman of Ways and Means must have been satisfied that all was in order for him to come forward with such a motion. On the hon. Gentleman's wider point—it is a genuine point—about the unsatisfactory way in which trust ports work and operate, I agree with him. Present accountability is not perhaps what one would desire.

Last December, in one of the first Adjournment debates to which I replied, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and I discussed the old concept of trust ports. I said that, in some ways, accountability was not the most acceptable method. The hon. Gentleman pointed out all the problems in the current set-up of trust ports. I hope that by following this route, trust ports will be free to do certain other things and also be more accountable. That is an important point. I am sometimes surprised by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter). Although he attacks the Tees and Hartlepool port authority with some vigour, he goes on to say what an excellent company it is and how well it is doing. We all share that view. We want it to be prosperous and successful.

Mr. Harry Barnes: I do not think that the Government can wash their hands of the affair, pass it to the Chairman of Ways and Means and say that it is in the House merely to recommend a technical measure to enable us to move forward. It has always been involved with the Tees and Hartlepool Bill. The measure was introduced so that 50 per cent. of finance would be transferred to the Treasury. If that had been written into the Tees and Hartlepool Bill, it would no longer have been a private Bill, it would have been a public Bill, and we should have found a way around it. At this stage matters have been superseded by other Government legislation. The Minister's Department initially encouraged Tees and Hartlepool to take exactly the line that it took to introduce the private measure. The Government are up to their neck in the provisions. They cannot simply say that the matter is technical—they must argue a political case in support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not on this occasion, though. At the risk of tedious repetition, I remind the House that we are discussing a procedural motion. The four Bills have completed all their stages in the House of Commons, and we are considering the procedural motion relating to whether they should now be considered by the House of Lords. I fully acknowledge that there is a certain relevance to legislation that the Government may bring forward later. I understand that that can be an argument for or against the revival motion, but we cannot discuss the merits of the Bills on this occasion.

Mr. Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What I meant was that, to support a procedural motion, there were political arguments about the right and wrongs of the case, which the Government needed to present to us to influence the situation. I grant that the decision that is then to be made is procedural and that procedural elements are important to it, but in backing up the procedural points, the matter is stretched further.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that point. I am being as helpful as I can to the House. As long as the arguments are for or against the revival motion, the debate will be in order.

Dr. Godman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on what you said a couple of minutes ago. If the procedural motion is passed, where stand the rights of petitioners? If it is successful, will it mean that petitioners will be able to place petitions with the other place? Where are the rights of petitioners with regard to the motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The rights of petitioners are not a matter for me, of course. The Bill has passed its stages in this House. If the motion is passed, the Bill will proceed to the Lords. The House of Lords has its own procedures for petitioning, and I have no authority to say what the procedures are in that regard.

Dr. Godman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the motion is passed, will petitioners have the right to put down petitions of objection to the Bill in the House of Commons?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. The procedure in this House on these Bills has been completed. All the stages have been gone through, so there are no further procedures other than the revival motion. Any further procedures will relate to the other place.

Mr. McLoughlin: It would be unfortunate not to agree to the motion in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means. I therefore urge the House to allow the Bills to be revived and to agree the motion. That would then allow full and proper consideration in the other place and for matters that may subsequently arise to be fully considered in the other place.

7.55 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall be brief, as many of my hon. Friends wish to make important points.

It is extraordinary that we are debating this revival motion. We are told by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport that it is not a Government motion and that he is present technically on behalf of the Chairman of Ways and Means to assist further consideration of the four private Bills when our major concern in respect of each of the Bills should be some way of introducing an integrated transport system. Procedurally there is no way in which the thrust of the four Bills can achieve an integrated transport system. That point must be considered in conjunction with the procedural motion.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not here in preference to the Chairman of Ways and Means. I am here to point out the Government's position on the motion.

Ms. Walley: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, but it does not clarify the matter. It shows the confusion that there is about how to proceed with the four private Bills. It is a sharp practice. We have four private Bills, each of which should have a separate debate in its own right, which would give hon. Members an opportunity to vote on the issues involved in each of them. Of course, we shall not have an opportunity to do that. We may have one view on one private Bill and we may wish to see it proceed, but we may have valid reasons, as we have on port trusts, for thinking that it is not appropriate to proceed because of the arguments that have been well set out by my hon. Friends.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Lady will agree that there have been debates on those matters, individually and separately, as one would expect with any Bill.

Ms. Walley: I do not agree. A debate occurred in the previous Session, but we are in a changed situation. The Queen's Speech promised new legislation on the port trusts. We are simply trying to establish whether the issue is one of principle that should best be left until the whole House has an opportunity to discuss new initiatives which the Government will bring forward and which I hope will be part of an integrated transport system, or whether we shall make decisions about what is to happen to two port trusts, and make those decisions in the dark. Clearly, at this stage we do not know what is in the draft legislation that is is still to be published and to come before the House. For that very reason, Opposition Members are in great difficulty about deciding whether to accept the revival motion.

We have before us a consultation procedure from the Government on private Bills and new procedures. Whether or not a new Prime Minister has been elected, everybody agrees that there is a clear and urgent need to examine the private Bill procedure and the way in which we conduct business in the House. Perhaps we should have the generosity to say that there will be occasions that suggest that the present procedures need to be redesigned and re-thought.

We have consultation documents and Bills hanging over from the previous Session. It is proposed that they should now be brought forward into this Session, but the Government have not said how the new procedures will be introduced. If it is possible for the Government to spend all this time bringing back private Bills when we now have the primary legislation that we were promised, why has it not been possible for the Government to deal with the issue of the new procedures which are so urgently needed? Important issues are set out for our consideration, such as environment impact assessments, and need to be considered for each of the four private Bills.

There is a great hurry, which makes me suspicious. I am also suspicious about the reasons for tabling the revival motion, which is aimed at getting the two port trust Bills quickly through this Session.

We have not heard any answers from the Minister about the Government's intentions in the new legislation. We have not had any answers about workers' shares. None of our questions has been answered. Nor have we heard anything about responsibilities for navigation and conservation. When we considered water privatisation, environmental protection was a key issue. The Government had to bring back a second set of proposals setting out the need for a National Rivers Authority. The Government had to recognise that there should be some separation——

Mr. McLoughlin: That was always Government policy.

Ms. Walley: No, it was not always Government policy. The early drafts did not suggest that. However, it was clear that safeguards were needed if the Government were to introduce their proposals to separate the different functions of gamekeeper and poacher, about which we heard so much. We need to know whether the new legislation on the port trusts will set out the conservation functions and the way in which those functions will be taken over by whatever replaces the port trusts.

We have not had any answers about retrospective legislation. Clearly we do not want one set of proposals in respect of two ports and a completely different set of proposals for all the other ports. Without safeguards, it is difficult to see how we can proceed.

So far, we have not heard anything about the London Underground (Victoria) Bill, which had fairly widespread support. The safety proposals were supported by hon Members of all parties. However, we have not heard anything from the Government about whether, if there is to be great haste in getting that private Bill on to the statute book, the £3 billion that has already been announced by the Secretary of State for Transport will be used to finance the vital work that the Bill would enable to go ahead. Given the current cash crisis, we need some assurances from the Minister about whether that work can proceed if the Bill is timetabled and given Royal Assent.

Those are all important issues. We are faced with an omnibus of different revival motions. New legislation is to be introduced later. However, we have not had any proper answers from the Minister, and I do not see how it is possible to proceed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to comment on the possible reform of private Bill procedure, but as procedure has been mentioned, perhaps it would help the House if I were to explain briefly and in a little more detail what the motion actually means and what the House will be doing if it passes it tonight.

Such motions are customary and have been approved regularly in previous Sessions when it is sought to suspend or revive Bills which have been passed by the Commons and which are currently under consideration by the Lords. On 12 November this year, the Lords informed this House that they had passed a resolution that, if the Bills were brought from the Commons in the present Session, they should resume progress at the stage that they had reached at Prorogation. The present motion is therefore a necessary procedural courtesy which has the effect of returning the Bills to the Lords for further consideration. The motion means no more and no less than that.

8.4 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If I may say so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a most eloquent observation on my earlier points of order.

To be honest, I was hoping that the promoter of the Clyde Port Authority Bill would be present to withdraw his Bill. However, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) has been recalled to the first team in St. Andrew's house.

Taking on board what you said earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to place on the record the fact that I am unhappy about the motion, first, because it is a matter of deep regret that we are proceeding with the motion, which deals with the Clyde Port Authority Bill, when the forthcoming public legislation will presumably deal with the other 30-odd trust ports——

Mr. Worthington: There are more than that.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend suggests that there may be more. I am concerned that we may not give adequate protection to those employed by, say, the Clyde port authority if we pass the motion.

Mr. Bell: I should like to correct what I said earlier. When asked how many trust ports there are, off the top of my head I said that there are 30; I should have said that there are 52.

Dr. Godman: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. His intervention emphasises my point that we are dealing here with two trust ports out of a total of 50-odd. It is a matter of deep regret that we are debating this revival motion——

Mr. Harry Barnes: We need to sort out the problem about the number of trust ports. I have with me a map that was submitted to the Committee that considered the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. Totting up the number of trust ports on the map, I come to a figure of 40, plus one in the Isle of Wight. Perhaps the total of 52 includes municipal ports, company ports, nationally owned ports and associate member ports. Unless there is another avenue, it looks as though the number is 40.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating the number of trust ports.

Dr. Godman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall stick rigorously to your instructions.

As I have said, I am concerned about the forthcoming public legislation. However, I hope that I shall also be in order if I say that we have fresh evidence about the CPA Bill to employ in our case against the motion. I do not see why the two port authorities referred to in the motion should be excluded from the forthcoming public legislation. New evidence has appeared since the House completed its consideration of the CPA Bill. Numerous recent concerns and developments bear upon that Bill, but even now, we cannot debate them.

One important matter that was brought to my attention in Greenock just a few days ago is the fact that the ownership of properties and land in Greenock that is claimed by the CPA is now disputed by men and women who can only be described as decent and honourable—I refer to the members of the Greenock Waterfront Heritage Association, which asserts with considerable justification that various waterfront properties claimed by the CPA belonged to the people of Greenock by way of a feu signed in the 18th century.

As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will understand, deep concern is being expressed over the tragic collision that took place not far from my constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham)—the foundering of the motor fishing vessel Antares, with the loss of its four-man crew. The sinking, brought about by the collision between the vessel's gear and a submerged Royal Navy nuclear submarine highlights a number of issues which impinge on the Clyde Port Authority Bill.

We should be in a position to discuss with the CPA changes in navigational routes and the conduct of vessels, particularly military ones, in and around the firth of Clyde. The CPA, as presently constituted, could play an important mediating role to prevent the recurrence of such a dreadful tragedy. Such a navigational role in the firth of Clyde and the River Clyde, and dredging in the upper reaches of the Clyde cannot be left to a private company.

There are developments ashore that impinge on the motion. Therefore, it would be best for all involved if the motion were not passed so that, by way of public legislation, we could come afresh to a Bill dealing with CPA ownership to examine recent developments, including tragic ones such as the sinking of the Antares and economic developments taking place in our constituencies on the banks of the Clyde. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie outlined in an intervention, there is concern about the selling and acquisition of shares in the Clyde Port Authority plc. I fear that such shares may eventually be acquired by those living far away from the Clyde, with no interest in it and its communities.

There are sound arguments against the revival motion, particularly in light of recent developments. They include the fears over share ownership in Clyde Port Authority plc, the legitimate worries of members of Greenock

[Dr. Godman]

Waterfront Heritage Association and others of my constituents who have an affection for the CPA and a respect for its officials. That affection and respect does not prevent them from criticising those officials and managers from time to time. There is deep concern about what will happen to the Clyde port authority when it becomes a private authority.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend is aware of the terrible tragedy that happened some time ago when six of my constituents lost their lives aboard the Destiny. The Clyde port authority is an agency that we hope would put forward plans and policies involving safety on pleasure craft and other vessels using property owned by the Clyde port authority. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of my concern and that of my constituents. It would be nonsense for the Clyde port authority to be taken away.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend raised an important issue. He referred to the tragic sinking of the motor fishing vessel Destiny, days before Christmas 1989. The vessel was skippered by Billy Irving of Gourock, a member of the Clyde Fishermen's Association. My hon. Friend is right that, where safety regulations govern sea angling expeditions in boats owned by Clydesiders, the Clyde port authority may well have a role to play that is perhaps more important than that of the district council, which determine the safety regulations. My hon. Friend is right —the CPA could make a useful contribution to determining regulations governing excursions such as the one that ended in deep tragedy for the families of my hon. Friend's six constituents. The CPA, as a public authority, could play an important role, but will be prevented from doing so when it is privatised.

I cannot ask the Minister to withdraw the motion because as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rightly said, it is a procedural motion. However, if the Bill is revived and resuscitated in its current condition, that decision will be treated with deep dismay and serious concern in my constituency and elsewhere on the Clyde. I urge my hon. Friends to argue against the motion because the Bill to which it refers—to put it in as disinterested a way as I can —is simply not worth reviving in its present form.

A privatised Clyde port authority may prove to be, in numerous respects, a far more efficient organisation than the present authority as a generator of employment in new and revitalised traditional industry. The CAP, as structured at present, is the best sort of organisation for the communities I represent in the towns of Greenock and Port Glasgow to deal with developments ashore and changes which may come about in the navigational channels in and around the firth of Clyde.

We are entering what is popularly called a post cold war era. To control vast submarines in the fishing grounds in and around the firth of Clyde, the Clyde port authority with its highly competent managers has a role to play: to separate fishing vessels and the submarines. I am not sure whether the Department of Transport can do that, with all due respect to the Minister and his colleagues. The job should be done by a locally based authority that enjoys the respect and trust of Clydeside communities——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am finding it very difficult to link the hon. Gentleman's arguments to the revival motion.

Dr. Godman: I do not want to take advantage of your good nature and courtesy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The revival motion is a bad idea because legislation is to come for all the trust ports. This motion has come at a bad time and I am only sorry that I am not in a position to appeal to the sponsor of the Bill, asking him to withdraw it so that we can deal with the matter in a more sensible and tough-minded way. We could do that when discussing a Bill covering all the trust ports.

Mr. Harry Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, members of a private Bill Committee must sign a declaration to the effect that they have no connection with or constitutional interest in the area covered by the Bill. That was done in the Committee discussing the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill but we now discover that that Bill has been influential in shaping the public Bill for port privatisation.

Two hon. Members who served on the private Bill Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) represent constituencies in which there are trust ports——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This sounds to me more like a matter that could be discussed on the debate on the revival motion. I cannot see that there is a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Barnes: The normal procedures for the House for dealing with work in Committee have been tampered with, as a result of which the Government are to supersede the Tees and Hartlepool legislation with an omnibus Bill covering all the trust ports. The two hon. Members whom I have mentioned could fairly claim that trade in their areas was not affected by the Tees and Hartlepool measure but they certainly will be affected by the general Bill—and that has a bearing on whether Opposition Members will support the measure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair but if the hon. Gentleman, with his well known ingenuity, catches the eye of the Chair he may be able to make these points during the debate.

8.26 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The ruling on revival motions place the House in a straitjacket. Hon. Members who want to put forward their views, which are important to their constituencies and to the economy of their areas, must try not to displease the Chair and must set out to humour its occupant so as to earn a degree of flexibility. The House is at its best when we seek to comply with Standing Orders and the rulings of the Chair.

Bills of this sort are given a Second Reading, when we can argue more widely about the general principles of the Bill. Then, when the patience of the House has been fully exploited, we have a Standing Committee—in this case a private Bill hearing—after which the Bill returns to the House and hon. Members are obliged to hold a different sort of debate, as we did but recently when we discussed our worries based on the evidence brought to the Committee.

Now we must draw on the bank of knowledge of the Bill that has accumulated over a full year since the Bill was deposited on 27 November last year. We seek how best to adduce legitimate and salient arguments, linked directly or indirectly with the strictures governing the revival motion debate.

The paramount reason why we should not return the Bill to the House of Lords is simple and it should appeal to the prudence of the Government. As the Government have enabling legislation to privatise the trust ports on level terms, why should not those level terms apply to the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, which runs the third largest port in the United Kingdom? Moreover, a great deal of money has already been spent on this private Bill. As the objectives of the Government and of the port authority are the same—they both want privatisation——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The directors of the port authority.

Mr. Leadbitter: Indeed, the Government and the directors want the same thing. So why cannot we co-operate and save money by so doing?

A further reason for not returning the Bill to the Lords has to do with Government policy. The Tees and Hartlepool port authority has already spent almost £1 million on the Bill and the petitioners who are against it have already spent £160,000. In order to petition if the Bill goes to the Lords, thousands of pounds more will have to be spent. When the promoters deposited the Bill on 27 November last year, they knew that enabling legislation was coming before the House. Much money has already been spent, and prudence suggests that we should now save some.

The Minister may say that the outstanding idea of returning the Bill to the Lords is not a matter for him because it is a private Bill. In a letter that I received from the management of the Clyde port authority I learnt that which the Tees and Hartlepool port authority was not prepared to tell us, that the Clyde port authority was complying with the wishes of the Government. I shall come later to the subterfuge. That authority shared the Government's thoughts on privatisation and the Government were actively promoting, aiding and abetting in the introduction of that Bill to the House, as was the case with the Tees and Hartlepool Bill.

The Minister could say that I am correct. The ports will be included in the Government's enabling measures in January and because the new Prime Minister may want to take the temperature of the electoral waters sooner than we think, it makes good sense for the Government to concern themselves with saving public money. They should consider ratepayers and taxpayers for a change. They could say, "As it is inevitable that the ports will be privatised, we should take away this tiddleywink Bill."

I am sure that the Minister saw some substance in my intervention and his assertion that the Bill had a night to go to the Lords was not exactly unchallenged. Perhaps he thought that I had something up my sleeve when I said that the Bill may go to the Lords on the vote of one out of 650 hon. Members—that is, the Chairman of the Private Bill Committee. When there is a changeover in the Chair, I do not like to have any misunderstandings. So that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, may be put in the picture about the argument that I am patiently developing——

Madam Deputy Chairman (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have been listening outside.

Mr. Leadbitter: That shows that you are a good Chairman, because even when you are not in the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are courteous enough to find out what is happening. I was talking about one vote. As long-serving Chairmen, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that none of us dares use our casting vote in Committee except to maintain the status quo.

Mr. Harry Barnes: A further point relevant to my earlier point of order arises about the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field). That constituency has in it Cowes trust port. By the exercise of his casting vote, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight involved himself in a scenario that pioneered the development of trust port privatisation through Tees and Hartlepool and led to other measures that affected his own trust port. Therefore, he contravened the provisions of a document that he had signed, which said that he had no interest in the measures that the Committee was discussing. It would at least have been prudent for the hon. Member for Isle of Wight not persistently to exercise his casting vote.

Mr. Leadbitter: My hon. Friend may deal later much more succinctly and in detail with the theme that he introduced. I fully agree with him on that important matter.

I should like to draw the Minister's attention to another aspect of the Bill. It pertains to why he should pass on the Bill to the Lords, which is what we are here to discuss. "Erskine May" lays down quite clearly that the members of a private Bill Committee should act in a judicial manner. That is quite different from a member of any other Committee who may have to apply opinion and political argument. My attention has reluctantly been drawn to the fallibilities of the legal profession, and I have had to check carefully to see whether I, with my small and rather limited experience in the House, have hit on a matter about which the House should be concerned. The Minister is no doubt wondering what I am about to say.

I have spoken about the money spent by the Tees and Hartlepool port authority. Everybody has accepted that. I said that it had spent almost £1 million, and when an hon. Member mentions a figure in the House we have to ask ourselves how he arrived at the amount and what are its components. About £500,000 was spent on advertising the privatisation of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority and that pre-empted the decision of the House. None of us is allowed to do that. We cannot act or speak outside on the assumption that the House will agree with us. It is the other way round because the House decides and we have to accept its decision. As I say, the promoters of the Bill spent £500,000 on a national advertising campaign, and the Chairman and members of the Committee must have read the statements in those advertisements. The beneficial effect of the judicial isolation of the Committee was breached.

That is not the only unfortunate aspect. So stupid is the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, so abrasive is its attitude, so completely ignorant is it of its pledge of support for the area, that it employed a London agency to do the job. The local area did not get the benefit of the £500,000.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Was not the amount spent entirely unreasonable, and is not the fact that it was spent outside the area a sign of the way things will go if the Bill is passed? The money will be spent on horizontal integration rather than on helping the local area.

Mr. Leadbitter: My hon. Friend is right. However, I want to link this factor with the motion.

For reasons that I shall not go into, if the Bill were to go to the Lords, our petitioning against it would not be so strong. However, that money spent in the south underlines what the chief executive of the port authority said in his evidence. The parliamentary counsel asked him whether his private enterprise philosophy was contradictory to the purposes of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Act 1966, and he said, "That's why we've got the Bill."

Another reason why the Bill should not go to the House of Lords is that we should be satisfied before we let it go that things are being done in the best interests of the authority. When giving evidence, Mr. Hackney made it abundantly clear in reply to questions put to him by counsel that the constitution of the authority, under the 1966 Act, was adequate for all the purposes of the port. Apart from section 12(1), nothing in the Act makes it impossible for the port authority to invest as it wishes. For instance, it already has shares and investments in a wide range of non-port undertakings.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) challenged me. Unfortunately, he has been kicked in the leg, or threatened with reselection, or has had a seizure, so he is not here. We do not know why he is not here, but as we are concerned with each other's health, I shall be asking about his welfare. I know that things are hard for the Conservative party. He may feel that the time has come for retirement and is practising for that.

I must apologise to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh. I was challenged by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who is also not here. A fit man does not come here, when a lame man has. He asked whether it was possible for a trust port to have shares in a Government agency. I thought that perhaps I should check on that, and the documents show that it is the other way.

The fanciful thing is that I object to the Bill going to the Lords because, apart from one or two hon. Members, of whom I am one, nobody has a clear understanding of it. If I am the only possessor of that knowledge, other hon. Members should be concerned about sending the Bill to the Lords. On Second Reading, I did not want to give hon. Members a tutorial on the finances of the authority because I had more important things to say about the Bill, but I can give a simple answer now.

The Tees and Hartlepool port authority and the Cleveland development corporation got together and wondered how to make legitimate the investment that they were discussing. The Clevement development corporation could not invest in a Government agency, so it set up a company, the Hartlepool Renaissance Company. Because it is a separate company, although with the same personnel, the Tees and Hartlepool port authority was able to give it shares to the value of the land on which the marina was being built. That is known as a convertible share arrangement. That is possibly one of the more sensible things that the authority has done.

We should be concerned not only about letting the Lords have this Bill, but about making it more widely known among hon. Members who will vote on the motion tonight that in Committee the evidence showed that the port authority, which is wanting to spread its wings and speculate on investment schemes throughout the world, has a poor record on investment. It has touched nothing that marks it out as an expert in finance, high investment or entrepreneurial ventures. It has played with tiddlywinks and lost its money but claimed that it went on a rescue operation. It has no backing to support its dreams of economic voyaging around the world. Indeed, counsel referred to it as having dreams——

Mr. Worthington: Are the provisions in the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill similar to those in the Clyde Port Authority Bill, in that the members of the authority—about whom my hon. Friend has spoken scathingly—can become dominant members of the privatised company? Is there an open way in which other people can become the dominant members of that company?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) has done so well, so far, in keeping to the revival motion. He is wise enough to know that he must not go down the road suggested by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington).

Mr. Leadbitter: Perhaps I will follow my hon. Friend's remarks, so I must work out how to weave that into the procedural requirements. If I succeed, I shall be congratulated; if I do not, I shall be shot down. Either way, it will be quite a thrill coming from you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall try to weave it in, but not in a naughty way.

I have already given good reasons why the Bill should not go to another place—for example, the use of the Chairman's casting vote, the powers that already exist under present legislation, and the judicial responses of members of the Committee, who had been subject to a £500,000 national publicity campaign that they could not avoid seeing. There is another reason, which is both intriguing and fascinating. Surely it is not the will of the House, or of any hon. Member, freely to give a windfall to a handful of people. The only way that that could happen would be if the payroll vote were told not to take any notice of people like me, and to vote in a particular way.

Under the Bill, the proposed structure will mean that control of the holding company will fall into the hands of a consortium, which was not named or identified in any way during evidence to the Committee. However, we know that the largest shareholding will have control. I come now to the intriguing aspect. When the sale takes place, the Government will take 50 per cent. of the proceeds, and 50 per cent. will remain. Let us say that 50 per cent. is in the bank. The consortium than takes control and so takes back that 50 per cent., and it also has the port—what a rip-off! I have done it, Madam Deputy Speaker. You told me not to discuss that unless I could keep within our procedure. I found a way to do that, so I should be congratulated.

The House should not allow the Bill to go to another place, because of the reasons that I have given. I have explained what is happening, and that cannot be rebutted. Mr. Hackney agreed that that was happening. A group of people will get control. They have paid for that through the shares, but they will get back their money because they

will have 50 per cent. of the sale proceeds, and they will have the port as well. In my language, that is highway robbery.

Mr. Harry Barnes: In Committee, Mr. Hackney accepted the term "double your money". They will get the money and the port.

Mr. Leadbitter: Hon. Members might be persuaded to vote against the motion if they but knew about certain actions during the month of October. It was a month of letters, press releases and general hanky-panky by the port authority. Hon. Members might be surprised to learn that I received a letter from the authority's secretary, and it was that letter which caused me to feel so strongly that we should not allow the Bill to go to another place. It was the most downright disgraceful, ill-tempered, ill-advised and imprudent letter that I have received in 43 years of public life. I contacted the authority's chief executive, but he said that he knew nothing about it. He spoke to the secretary and he also looked at copies of the correspondence. Within half an hour, he told me that he was not prepared to accept that sort of language from the secretary, that the letter would be withdrawn, and that I would receive the necessary apologies. That shows that not only are the procedural requirements of the House important, but they must not be impinged upon by conduct which motivates people to go in one direction or another.

Because of the courtesy of the chief executive, I gave an undertaking that I would not reveal what was in the letter and I am keeping faith with that, but the House should be aware of the kind of treatment I received for taking part in an important debate on an important issue.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend is noble in giving a commitment not to reveal the contents of that letter. As a distinguished Member of Parliament, who serves on the Chairmen's panel, does he think that there was a breach of parliamentary privilege in a letter being written to a Member of Parliament about comments made in the House? Is not Mr. Wellington, the secretary of the port authority, fortunate not to have been called to the Bar of the House to explain his conduct?

Mr. Leadbitter: I thought seriously about that at the time. I have a certain weakness—I do not know how I came to have it—but although I can hit hard, I find that when I have my opponent in a corner I feel some compassion. The Chair gave me the freedom to relate that story, and I think that the House had the right to hear it. However, as I told the chief executive of the authority, I accept that the authority's secretary must know his job. Therefore, the letter must have been written in what I would call a state of unfortunate exuberance. In other words, I was far kinder to him that he was to me.

I referred to October as being the month of letters and press releases. Unfortunately, there is another reason why the Bill should not go to the other place. Those letters and press releases represent—in writing—lying, deceiving, practically the worst form of blackmail and obnoxious manners that should not be tolerated by people charged with the responsibility of dealing with serious public affairs. There must be certain standards.

The vote of hon. Members tonight is important. The Bill has taken a year to reach this stage and we now come to the final fence. It is important the House should consider that final hurdle. Yet Hartlepool borough council and Cleveland county council received a letter dated 26 October making it clear that the Tees and Hartlepool port authority would let the planning committee of those two authorities have land in order to build a carriageway from the Middleton pier in Hartlepool to the dual carriageway.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will come back to the procedural motion.

Mr. Leadbitter: I will, Madam Deputy Speaker. If hon. Members knew of that suggestion they just might, on balance, vote against the Bill tonight. That letter laid down a condition. The petitioners, an interested body of people, said that they would let the local authorities have the land on the condition that they withdrew their opposition to the Bill. How is that as a way of dealing with public affairs? That offended both councils who then got in touch with the Member of Parliament dealing with the opposition to the Bill to express their concern at being forced to do something by the promise of land being conditional upon their withdrawing their opposition.

That is hypocritical, because I have already related how the Tees and Hartlepool port authority has shares in the marina and so is of that development. It is in its own interests to have the linkage and yet it tells the two local authorities that it will be hard. I have got news for it. I have just informed the authorities that since it is in the interests of the marine development to have the road link, it must forget about being a hard seller, it is an anxious seller and must offer the least price that it can get away with.

How the Bill could have been a public Bill if the 50 per cent. levy had been written into it has already been dealt with. In other words, the Bill would not be a private Bill. It would not exist. It would have to come with the enabling legislation. The interesting thing is that the port authority has made it known that it won 50 per cent. of the proceeds. That is the first time we have ever learnt from serious men that if someone take away 50 per cent. what is left is a gain. That is nonsense. It is not true because, in evidence to the Committee, the council made it clear that that 50 per cent. was not even known to the authority when it deposited the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman, to use his own words, is now being naughty, although he promised that he would not be. He has been ingenious in debating the revival motion and I am sure that he will now stay with the procedure and not with the subject matter.

Mr. Leadbitter: The Chair will be concerned with our reasons for opposing the revival motion and, I hope, with nothing else. I appreciate that I must not deviate from the main stream of your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not know how long I could pursue that theme without being caught.

I turn now to what is known as the essential principle of the Bill. It must be approached with care, because there is some misconception about the nature of the Bill itself. The promoters submit that the result will be a free and independent port—no more, no less. However, the council might with ease gain from the promoter of the Bill—in the guise of the chief executive, Mr. Hackney—an admission that the purpose of the Tees and Hartlepools Port Authority Act 1966, which followed the Rochdale report, was to achieve a port which was independent, autonomous

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and financially self-supporting. Therefore, the claim that the new Bill will confer freedom and independence on the port cannot be true.

If the Bill before the House is enacted, the port authority will disband and reform as a trust. It will then create a holding company, but the port itself will be a subsidiary. The port authority will cease to be independent, autonomous, and self-financing. We argue that the Bill should not go to another place because it would be doing so under false pretences.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member intends to continue speaking—there is no reason why he should not—I trust that he will not deploy arguments relating to the purpose of the Bill. With his long-standing experience as a parliamentarian, the hon. Member will be familiar with the limits of a procedural motion. He said that he was at the beginning of his speech.

Mr. Leadbitter: The Deputy Speaker who immediately preceded you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, read a ruling, which I confirmed by scanning "Erskine May". I discovered that we were both correct in our interpretation of the wording. The Chair rules that debate must be confined to the revival motion—and, as I agree, there is no conflict between us so far. However, I have tried very hard, and somewhat ingeniously, to argue why the Bill should not go to another place. Hon. Members such as I who behave with cultivated innocence should attempt not to be repetitious. That is a bonus that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have enjoyed as a consequence of the persuasion that you have employed. I, at least, have not been repetitious.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been repetitious in that he has repeated Second Reading arguments.

Mr. Leadbitter: That is right—and the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to do that, because we are in the business of seeking support, which is the function of an Opposition. We must seek support not only from the Conservative Benches, but from the Chair.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Earlier, my hon. Friend mentioned the group that had been involved in setting up a project in Hartlepool. Perhaps that project is similar to one involving the Clyde port authority which is trying to develop the Braehead site. This strikes me as jumping the gun—as retrospective legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is moving into areas that I have just forbidden.

Mr. Leadbitter: Diplomacy must operate here—I cannot demonstrate outwardly that I agree with my hon. Friend, because I do not wish to offend the Chair, but I do not want to comply with the Chair to such an extent as to offend my hon. Friend. In the circumstances, I may have to escape the consequences by sitting down.

In the light of the weaknesses of the Bill, the House must make a real attempt not to let it proceed to the Lords. The House must, in such circumstances, always be satisfied that the evidence is so overwhelming that it is unreasonable to stop the progress of a measure. Is the House satisfied that that is the case? If hon. Members allow the Bill to proceed to the House of Lords today, they will be ignoring the fact that the promoters did not produce one expert witness in the Committee hearings. Does the House intend to allow the Bill to proceed today, knowing full well—this is not merely the due of the hon. Member for Hartlepool—that in Committee the port authority chairman was given statutory authority by the Secretary of State to communicate with him on all matters of importance regarding the port? Yet the chairman himself did not make a single appearance before the Committee.

The position is certainly rather odd. It is clear that, under the present legislation, the port is independent, autonomous and financially self-supporting. It is also important to note that all its activities are for the port, within the port, and that it is free to invest. The corollary, however, is that although its welfare and interests are matters solely for the port, the Bill places it in a secondary position in, as it were, a "group" concept. It appears that the House must now allow the Bill to proceed without taking that into account. I have emphasised the desirability of establishing a subsidiary company, with the new authority as a holding company, but under the Bill the priorities of the port will become secondary to the targeting of investment bringing short-term high-profitability returns, as opposed to long-term, low-return investments in the port itself.

That is why, as we see from page 1 of the report of the sixth hearing of evidence to the Committee, counsel for the promoters said that the condition in section 12(1) of the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Act 1966 about keeping the port safe and commodious—as it was before the passing of earlier legislation—was a constraint on the port authority. If it is a constraint on the port authority, then before the Bill be sent to the other place we must heed the clear message that money will not be spent on it.

Meanwhile, container investment in the authority is non-existent, although to enable it to compete with other ports, taking account of proposed installations, would require expenditure of between £60 million and £80 million. In other words, the £20 million now in reserve could be a first step to meeting the competition that will arise from 1992——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman, and any other hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye, that the House earlier passed the Bill to the other place. Tonight we are determining whether to pass the procedural motion.

Mr. Leadbitter: I appreciate that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I want to halt that motion and stop the measure going to the other place.

It should be clear from what I have said and from the deliberations in Committee that only a handful of people —fewer than five—were instrumental in allowing the Bill to continue on its journey. But I fear that the House has not heeded the warnings given by my hon. Friends and me, even though an enabling measure could have done the job for free. From that point of view, we are witnessing idiocy and imprudence at its peak. The port authority consulted nobody, not even the county, until the Bill was deposited. I have been associated with the port for more than 25 years. I was a chief policy witness prior to the earlier

legislation being passed. Despite that, and despite all the knowledge of the issue that I possess, I received not one offer of consultation from the authority.

I feel extremely strongly for the people whom I represent. I know their real worth and I am well aware of the magnificence of the work force and of managements throughout the northern region. I would be foolish to lose any opportunity—because I have been so disappointed with the authority—to voice my views. Having done so, I now say to the authority, as I would say to any other authority, that if the Bill has the misfortune to become law, I shall try to make it work.

9.17 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Our concern tonight is simply whether to breathe life into the Bill and thereby revive it. In considering that, we must take note of certain incidents that should make us think again about the whole issue.

We have been misled, wittingly or unwittingly, about the Clyde Port Authority Bill and the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. Indeed, the Clyde port authority was misled, having been told by the Government that the only way it could be privatised was by promoting private legislation. I assume that the Tees and Hartlepool port authority received the same advice.

We were shocked to discover in the Queen's Speech a proposal to privatise all the trust ports. It would be foolhardy to privatise two trust ports when a Government Bill will privatise the other trust ports. We have no knowledge of the contents of that Bill, and the Minister may not know under what terms the other trust ports will be privatised.

The interests of the Government in promoting a Bill to privatise the trust ports are different from the interests of a port authority in promoting a private Bill. That was made clear in proceedings on the port authority Bills. The Government suddenly realised that, under the private Bills, a group of people who had not put a penny into the trust ports would be able to decide the future ownership of those ports and considerably influence who benefited from it. They realised that that would not be in order and belatedly said, "We shall impose a 50 per cent. levy," to ensure that they received some of the proceedings of the sale.

We are considering the motion only because the Clyde and Tees and Hartlepool port authorities have moved quicker than other trust ports. It will be interesting to see whether the Government accept the terms of the port authority Bills. It would be extraordinary if they accepted the same propositions as the port authorities. A number of people were appointed to the port authorities to be custodians of the public interest for a limited period—for example, as the chair of the Clyde port authority on a salary of £10,000 a year or as a port authority member on a salary of £3,500 a year—but under the private Bills they will be able to decide how the future wealth of the authorities is distributed. I am not implying that they will benefit from the distribution of wealth, but they will be able to decide who benefits from that distribution.

Mr. Holt: Does the hon. Gentleman know who is in that position at present, and is it not true that those who run the authorities can award themselves whatever salaries they like and no one has any control over that? Once the port authority is a public limited company, shareholders and others will not have that stricture.

Mr. Worthington: That is a helpful intervention, because it shows that we have considered the port authority Bills completely the wrong way round. There would be general agreement among hon. Members that the structure of port authorities is thoroughly inadequate because there is no accountability. There is a strange procedure in Scotland whereby the Department of Transport—God love it—and not the Secretary of State for Scotland, appoints the members of the trust authority. There seems no logic in the fact that a remote, London-based body plucks out 10 or a dozen people to run the port authority. Does that body exercise any scrutiny over the activities of the port authority? No, it does not.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport and received a reply from the Minister in which he said that there was no monitoring of the work of the port authority. In other words, we take no interest in whether it does a good or a bad job. The authorities are simply appointed and they get on with the work. There is no scrutiny of or interest in how they fulfil the task, so we have no idea whether the Tees and Hartlepool port authority or the Clyde port authority is efficient. Neither the Government nor anyone else asks whether the authorities do a good job.

Is there a need for legislation? It seems that the present structure of the port authorities is inefficient, and I suspect that the Minister agrees. A proper analysis of the way in which the port authorities have developed should have been carried out to obtain an appraisal of what was going right and what was going wrong. I believe that the Clyde port authority could have been massively improved. I also believe that it was unacceptable that the authority was neither a democratic nor a private body. It was not accountable to anyone, which led to the incredible statement by the director of the authority, which is engraved on my mind for ever, that

"above the Clyde port authority there is God."

That is strangely pompous, but it is also strangely true. Nobody can call the Clyde port authority to account. It could perform its task efficiently or inefficiently year in and year out.

One would have thought that the first action of a responsible Government who were confronted either with their own legislation or with private legislation would have been to appraise whether the present structure was working correctly.

Mr. Holt: If the trust ports were such an eyesore, why did no Labour Government have the courage to do anything about them?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) will deal with the motion.

Mr. Worthington: I am grateful both to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), whose intervention is relevant in considering whether to breathe life into the Clyde Port Authority Bill and into the others. I did not say that the port authorities were an eyesore, although a major eyesore in my constituency is under the control of the Clyde port authority. I was saying that no hon. Member has ever

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carried out research into how the port authorities work and into whether they are working efficiently or inefficiently.

The contentious issue is whether the authorities powers are restricted so that they cannot undertake activities that would make them efficient. That has never been appraised by anyone except the ports authorities, which have a vested interest.

This is a fundamentally inadequate way to proceed with legislation. During the passage of the Clyde Port Authority Bill, there has been no analysis of whether we need legislation or what form of legislation we need. It will be sad for hon. Members who represent constituencies in the area of the Clyde port authority and of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority to know that a far better analysis of the role of the other trust ports will be undertaken through the presentation of a public Bill. Ministers will come to the House having been fully briefed by the Department of Transport, and they will be able to argue their case properly.

With the Clyde Port Authority Bill, we did not have those advantages. We had a private Bill sponsored by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who has shown the extent of his interest in the Bill by his absence tonight. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Langbaurgh wish to intervene?

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman is attacking a man who has been made a Minister and who cannot be here for that reason. That is most unparliamentary.

Mr. Worthington: It so happens that the hon. Member for Eastwood has been made the Minister responsible for industry and employment in Scotland and the Bill is of significance to the development of Scotland. That the hon. Gentleman should have taken his interest in promoting the Bill outside the House and put other interests—

Mr. Holt: Cheap.

Mr. Worthington: All right: I shall not withdraw my remarks, because I think they are justified, but I shall take the House back to the Second Reading debate which took place while the hon. Gentleman was but a Back Bencher.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not discussing the Second Reading debate. The hon. Gentleman is fully aware that we are debating a revival motion, and I should like to hear arguments about whether the Bill should be passed to another place.

Mr. Worthington: I do not think that the Bill should be revived, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the House has never had the opportunity—on Second Reading, tonight or at any other stage—to consider its merits. The sponsor of the Bill, who now happens to be a Minister—I hope that he will prepare himself better in his new job—came to the House without knowing anything about the Bill and could not answer any of our questions. One of the central questions on the Bill, to which we really ought to be given an answer, concerns the identity of those who will be able to control the port authority in future.

Just to show the confusion that there was on Second Reading—a confusion which persists tonight—let me remind the House that, at that time, the sponsor of the Bill was talking in terms of the flotation of a public company. Only at a later stage did we find that the authority was to be floated not as a public but as a private company.

Mr. Bell: Is it not a fact that Mr. John Hackney has not been able to reconcile himself with Mr. Charles Wellington, the chief of Hartlepool, and that we do not know whether there will be a stock market flotation or not?

Mr. Worthington: My hon. Friend confirms the lack of certainty about who will be able to control the company in future. I have heard from the authority that some of the shares will go to the work force. We do not know what proportion it will be, although Opposition Members accept that there should be some employee share ownership. We do not know who else will control the company in future. We have heard only that some of the shares are likely to go to local institutions and organisations. As a local institution myself, I fully intend to apply for shares. I shall write to the company and say, "As a local institution—the MP for Clydebank and Milngavie—I should like shares in the Clyde port authority." I hasten to say to my hon. Friends that I have no intention of profiting from the shares: any profit will be given to local charities.

I shall be interested to hear the authority's response when I write to it to say that, out of interest in the future of the port and the river, I should like to be on the inside of the company. I wonder whether I shall be given the chance. Some of my hon. Friends may also wish to buy shares, although I shall not tonight commit them to doing so.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Whatever the share arrangement, we have some indication of what has been ruled out. On the Tees and Hartlepool Bill, on the Chairman's casting vote, the proposal that 50 per cent. of voting shares should go to the workers was defeated. Also, a proposal that the majority of the shares should go to the employees' pension fund and port users combined was defeated.

Mr. Worthington: That is why we should not breathe life into the Bill. What rules are the Bills setting up for the distribution of shares? We know nothing, and have been told nothing, about that basic issue. It would be a dereliction of duty to let the Bills go any further without clarification of that issue. I hope that that issue will be directly addressed in the Government's Bill.

With a normal privatisation, the Government lay down the terms under which the privatisation is to occur. They will say, for example, as they did with the electricity privatisation, "We are issuing shares at so much per share." Everybody gets a chance to bid for the shares. But that has not happened in this case. With the Government's Bill, it will be interesting to see whether they give fair access to the purchase of shares for any of the other trust ports or whether they will give privileged access to those who are already on the inside because they are members of the port authority.

Another major issue which has never been fully explored, and which is another reason why we should not breathe life into the Bill or revive it, is the valuation of the company's assets. The port authority has to set up the conditions in which the Clyde port authority will be sold to an institution. It must decide how it will realise the assets that I previously thought were public assets, but

apparently it is a difficult situation, in which there is no real owner, and something that I thought was public is to be turned into a private asset.

To sell off the assets of the port authority, they must first be valued by the port authority. Therefore, a firm, which I hope will be independent, will have to be hired to decide what value to put on the assets of the port authority. There may be talk of that firm being independent. However, if I wish to sell a property and I hire someone to value it for me, the valuer will assess that property on my behalf knowing that I am the seller of the property. Obviously, his duty is to me—I have hired him. His duty is to put the maximum possible value on the property. If I wish to buy property, I will hire professional advice from someone who will tell me the cheapest price for which I could get the assets and the lowest price that I should bid for them.

Under the Bill, the buyer and the seller are the same body. The Clyde port authority is liquidating itself, seeking to sell its assets and setting up a new company. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) eloquently said, initially the only members of the new company will be the Clyde port authority board members, because they will have liquidated themselves as a port authority and reconstituted themselves as the new trust and then as the new company. Who is to carry out a valuation when the buyer and the seller are the same? That issue has never been explored in the House, but it is another reason why we should hesitate to breathe life into these Bills. The issues have never been fully explained.

Other issues did not receive an airing until my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) spoke earlier. We are also talking about navigation rights, not simply about property on the banks of the river. We are talking about the maintenance of good conditions for sailing up and down, not only the Clyde, but as far as halfway down Arran and all the surrounding sea lochs. We are talking about the public good. My hon. Friend reminded us of the recent tragic accident caused by submarines using the same channel as fishing boats. Clearly the public good must be at the forefront of our minds.

There are many other important issues. We have not even mentioned dredging tonight because we did not want to go back over the Second Reading debate. However, we have given abundant reasons why it would be prudent for the House not to breathe life into these Bills. I hope that the forthcoming public Bill will deal with these issues much more sensibly and will have the public interest more at heart, and that we shall not proceed with these private Bills.

9.41 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): It has been said that this is only a procedural motion, with the implication that it is therefore of less significance than the substantive issues. However, as trade unionists among my hon. Friends know, procedural agreements can often be more important than substantive agreements. Sometimes in trade union negotiations on wages, an employer will try to give a good substantive agreement, but part of the terms include selling out the procedural arrangements. Therefore, procedure is important because it is by that process that legislation proceeds.

Hon. Members have referred only briefly to the fact that the motion deals with a number of other Bills apart from the port authority Bills. The motion refers also to the London Underground (Victoria) Bill and to the Shard Bridge Bill. Those may well be reasonable and honourable Bills, and they may well deserve to proceed—I do not know, because I have not investigated them and I have not read the Committee reports. Furthermore, I have heard nothing today to tell me why those two Bills, together with the port authority Bills, should proceed. It would have been procedurally sensible to have a different motion which would have allowed some division and separate debates on some of the Bills. The major elements in our discussions on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Clyde Port Authority Bill could perhaps have gone together because many of the principles arising from them are the same.

It is because the motion relates to the port authority Bills and because they are obnoxious in nature that we should not pass it. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to go into detail about those obnoxious provisions, so I simply direct hon. Members to the Committee reports and to our earlier debates in which they were spelt out in considerable detail.

I also oppose the motion insofar as it relates to the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, of which I have some knowledge because I served on the Committee dealing with it, because that Bill has already had its chance. Unless I hear some special reason today as to why we should pass the revival motion—I prefer to call it a Lazarus motion, as it brings the Bill back from the dead to pass it on to the Lords—I do not see why we should do so. No Conservative Member has sought to argue the merits of the procedure in which we are engaged. It has been said that as it is only procedure we should let it slip through, out of courtesy to the House of Lords. However, we are here not for purposes of courtesy but for serious investigation of legislation.

The THPA Bill has had its chance. It was deposited in the House on 27 November last year and went to Committee on 15 May. There were seven Committee meetings up to 6 June and a disastrous decision was made in Committee, with the Chairman's casting vote, that Committee members would not visit Tees and Hartlepool to see what they were talking about and meet the community in the district. That procedural nonsense led to two Labour Committee members walking out and insisting that the visit should take place. They were not seeking to hold up the Committee's procedures, but were concerned that they should do their duty before making their final decision. It took seven weeks for that trip to be organised and the day after it took place the matter went back to Committee, on 25 July. If the decision taken in Committee had been to allow the visit to stand, it would have done so the week following 6 June, there would have been substantially more time in which to deal with the measure and pass it to the Lords, and we could have made progress by now.

The Bill's statute of limitations has run out and we should not seek to revive it. It has been said that the Bill has been superseded by a measure in the Queen's Speech, which I believe is one of the most important provisions. The Tees and Hartlepool Bill, and the trouble that it caused, might have been one of the factors which led the

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

Government to decide to include the other measure in the Queen's Speech. Having been included in the Queen's Speech, that provision should have superseded the Bill.

We need to sort out trusts. There has been a statement in the House today, and we are establishing a new range of trusts related to the national health service. It was said that Hospitals would not opt out but that trusts would operate —but who can trust the trusts when they operate like those at Clyde and at Tees and Hartlepool have done and seek their own privatisation provisions in future. It seems that that pattern is likely to follow in the health service.

We should reject the measure above all because it is a Government Bill in all but name, behind which lie all sorts of Government involvement and manipulation. That has come from the Department of Transport, which encouraged the trust authorities of Clyde, and of Hartlepool and Tees to bring the measure forward. When the authorities failed to advance at sufficient speed, pressure was brought to ensure decisions which were carried on casting votes. The Government took over the measure when they realised that the other trust port provisions in this country would result in long-drawn-out processes. It is therefore most important that we should reject the motion.

9.47 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): In speaking against the revival motion, I should say that not one Member of Parliament from the banks of the River Clyde supports the privatisation of the Clyde port authority or has spoken in favour of it. I am deeply disappointed that the Bill's sponsor is not here to listen to some of the arguments put to stop the Bill going to the Lords.

It is appalling that the work force in the Clyde port authority is not to have control of the livelihood of its members. That matter should have been included in the Bill. Only last week, some of my constituents asked me what would happen to the profit from the sale of land that they had thought, for years and years, belonged to the public—the people of Renfrew, Glasgow and Inverclyde. Land that has belonged to the people of our areas is disappearing. This Bill is another rip-off; it is a disastrous step, which will lead to the shabby treatment of the Clyde. It will lead to the same sort of disasters as have happened along the banks of the Thames in London. We do not want that in Scotland. The River Clyde could and should be one of the most beautiful rivers in the country.

This is not the way forward for the people of the River Clyde and of Scotland. Time is not on my side, so I cannot say all that I should have liked to say against the revival motion. We are doing a disservice to the members of the public who fought for years to make the Clyde renowned. We have seen the demise of shipbuilding there, but I hope that the river can be cleared up and put to better use. Whether we like it or not, the Clyde port authority is one of the major landowners on the Clyde and the greedy vultures are ready to descend, eager to take its huge assets into private hands. I hope that the Minister has listened to those points.

9.50 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The outstanding feature of the debate has been the fact that we have not heard a solitary speech by a Conservative Member in support of any of these measures having fresh life breathed into them. We heard briefly from the Minister, although not as briefly as he had intended, but apart from that there has been nothing but the silence of the grave. Tory Members know that they can sit back and the work will be done for them by other forces.

Throughout most of the debate none of the sponsors of these Bills has been present, although two of them now are. It is particularly fascinating to wonder who the sponsor of the Clyde Port Authority Bill will be. In its first existence, its sponsor was the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who has been exalted to great heights recently. Such is his commitment to the future of the Clyde port, such is his genuine interest in the matter—he has been trying to put the Bill through the House for a year—such is his enthusiasm for the benefits to come to the industry of Scotland, for which he now has ministerial responsibility, and such is his sincerity that I understand that throughout these proceedings he has been in the Strangers Dining Room.

That shows what a con the Bills are. Little private vested interests controlled by people with an eye on the main chance nobble a Member and say, "Look pal, you put the Bill through for us, and once the arrangements have been made, who knows what will come out the other end?" The hon. Member for Eastwood has found his advancement in another form, so we wonder who will take the Bill forward. Will it be the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn), or will it perhaps be the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)? After that we begin to run out of Scottish Tory Members —the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) is a decent cove who would have nothing to do with the business. Who else is there? That is probably the greatest decision that the Clyde port authority has had to take for some time: to whom to pass the baton to take the Bill through the House?

We have heard much about the port authorities on many nights similar to this, and fortunately, due to the efforts of Opposition Members, the private Bills have not yet gone through. We assure Conservative Members that we shall continue to mount as much opposition as possible.

I happen to know a wee bit about the Shard Bridge Bill. Many hon. Members may wonder what the Shard Bridge Bill is and may reasonably wonder what I know about it. I know about it because I was appointed to the Committee on Unopposed Bills. I understand that people are paid large amounts to present Bills and to turn up and confront the members of such Committees. Like the three wise monkeys, the members of the Committee are supposed to nod the Bills through. We nodded through some fairly major Bills and then the Shard Bridge Bill came up. I asked what it was all about and I also asked what Shard was all about. I found that the Shard bridge is a toll bridge in the north-west of England. I also found that the purpose of the Bill was to increase the share capital of the Shard Bridge Company, which is doubtless owned by the great and good of Shard and the surrounding precincts.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:-

The House divided: Ayes 113, Noes 43.

Division No. 18] **[9.55 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Holt, Richard
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Marland, Paul
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thorne, Neil
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Thurnham and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Nellist, Dave
Pike, Peter L.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stuart Bell and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly:—

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 44.

Division No. 19] **[10.08 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Holt, Richard
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thorne, Neil
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Thurnham and
Mr. Christopher Gill.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*

Buckley, George J.	Leadbitter, Ted
Callaghan, Jim	Loyden, Eddie
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	McFall, John
Canavan, Dennis	McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	McMaster, Gordon
Clelland, David	Mahon, Mrs Alice
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Maxton, John
Cousins, Jim	Nellist, Dave
Cryer, Bob	Pike, Peter L.
Dalyell, Tam	Skinner, Dennis
Dixon, Don	Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Dunnachie, Jimmy	Vaz, Keith
Eastham, Ken	Walley, Joan
Flynn, Paul	Wareing, Robert N.
Foster, Derek	Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Wilson, Brian
Graham, Thomas	Wise, Mrs Audrey
Haynes, Frank	Wray, Jimmy
Henderson, Doug	
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*	**Mr. Harry Barnes and**
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*	**Mr. Terry Lewis.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [12 November] as relates to the Clyde Port Authority Bill, the London Underground (Victoria) Bill, the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Shard Bridge Bill be now considered.

The House accordingly proceeded to consider so much of the said Message.

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Bills may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bills, in the present Session; and the Petitions for the Bills shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bills shall be presented to the House not later than the seventh day after this day;

That there shall be deposited with each Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That each Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first, second and third time and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Overseas Government Debts

10.19 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move,

That the draft Debts of Overseas Governments (Determination of Relevant Percentage) Regulations 1990, which were laid before the House on 15th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

The regulations form part of the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the then Chancellor of the Exchequer on Budget day, which were discussed thoroughly during the Committee stage of the Finance Bill. The proposals introduced some changes to the tax treatment of doubtful sovereign debt; they are now contained in the Finance Act 1990.

Tax law allows relief for doubtful debt up to the amount estimated to be bad. While that works reasonably well for most debt, it proved very difficult to make accurate estimates of the amount of sovereign debt that will not be repaid, and large changes in estimates can have a significant effect on Exchequer receipts. As a result, we introduced some changes.

The new system preserves the principles on which tax relief is based, but will give greater certainty about tax deductions, and phases the cost of large changes to the Exchequer. It lays down rules—contained in the regulations—for calculating the maximum amount of debt eligible for relief, and sets some limit to the amount of relief allowable in any one year.

The regulations set the rules for measuring the extent to which a particular debt is irrecoverable. More specifically, they set the relevant percentage that is the maximum amount that can be allowed as a deduction for tax purposes. Each debt will be measured against the factors set out in schedule 1 of the regulations. Scores will be allocated, and the total score will be converted to give the maximum percentage of debt allowable as a deduction.

The regulations are broadly similar to the Bank of England's guidelines to banks on what provisions they should make on prudential grounds. Those guidelines are known as the matrix. One of the ways in which the regulations differ from that matrix is their exclusion of one of the more subjective factors, which requires an assessment of a country's present and future economic and political conditions. They set a definite percentage of debt that is tax-deductible, whereas the Bank of England matrix provides bands within which provisions for a country might be expected.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does not the presence of a Treasury Minister demonstrate the scale of the problem? Should not an Overseas Development Minister be dealing with the debate? Does not that show that the Treasury is the prime motivator behind policy in this important area, rather than Foreign Office Ministers —particularly the Minister for Overseas Development?

Charities and other outside bodies interested in overseas development have alleged that the Treasury is interfering, and is preventing Government from making the right decisions and adopting the right approach. Does not the presence at the Dispatch Box of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury prove their case conclusively?

Mr. Maude: It would be rather eccentric for a Minister other than a Treasury Minister to come to the House of Commons to introduce Inland Revenue regulations.

The Inland Revenue published the regulations for consultation, and we have accommodated most of the helpful and constructive comments that we received. The draft version that we are debating tonight forms an integral part of the changes that we have introduced to the tax treatment of doubtful sovereign debt. The regulations will, I believe, bring welcome certainty to what has been a very uncertain area of tax law.

10.23 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): That was an unusually brief ministerial introduction.

The current debt crisis is clearly devastating. In the words of Luis da Silva, a prominent Brazilian trade unionist,

"The Third World War has begun. A quiet war that is destroying Brazil, Latin America, and nearly the whole of the Third World. Instead of soldiers, it is the children who are dying. Instead of the wounded, there are millions of unemployed and the old. Instead of broken bridges, we see broken factories, schools, hospitals and whole economies . . . This war uses debts and interest as its most important weapon, and it is a more deadly weapon than the atom bomb."

Lula, as Luis da Silva is known in Brazil, and the children, the unemployed, the sick and the mothers struggling to cope have not been invited to the debate tonight. They are not able to contribute, but their lives are affected by the numbers and percentages that we are discussing.

Perhaps, in the view of Conservative Members, we are talking only about relevant percentages as a basis for granting tax relief on bad debts owed to Britain's commercial banks. We believe that we are talking about debt relief or, more specifically, the lack of it and the fact that millions of people are suffering unemployment, ill health and plummeting living standards because their Governments are handing over their nations' wealth to creditors.

In this debate, the creditors under consideration are the commercial banks. But I hope that we shall on future occasions debate the debts owed to Governments too. But of all the major actors in the debt crisis, the banks bear the greatest responsibility and have suffered least. At present, the Third world owes $338 billion to the commercial banks. United Kingdom banks have the third largest share, after the United States and Japan. Last year alone, commercial banks worldwide received $20 billion more from poor countries than they gave in new loans.

The effect of that transfusion from south to north has been a roll-back of development in Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia. Decades of progress have been undone. Income has fallen back to the levels of the mid-1970s in real terms. As Governments spend more and more on servicing the debt, the percentage of their budgets spent on health has fallen on average by a half in Latin America and the Caribbean. Infant mortality and malnutrition have risen alarmingly.

I cite as an example the Philippines and the debts incurred during the Marcos era. Debt servicing grew from 11 per cent. of the Government budget in 1980 to 46 per cent. in 1986—the same percentage of the budget that the British Government allocated that year to our defence, education, social security, welfare and housing.

As debt servicing soared, spending on social services in the Philippines sank by more than a third in real terms. Not surprisingly, by 1985 the percentage of families living in poverty in the Philippines had risen to 59 per cent. and real incomes were back to their 1975 levels. A quarter of all children in that agricultural land are now malnourished. As half the population are children, the on-going austerity, poverty and malnutrition will have enormous implications for future generations.

With Latin America dependent on exports of primary commodities for three-quarters of its export earnings, it is not surprising that the scramble for foreign exchange has encouraged the plundering of natural resources and the destruction of fragile environments. As the Brundtland report put it:

"Latin America's natural resources are being used not for development or to raise living standards, but to meet the financial requirements of industrialised country creditors."

I am speaking from the Dispatch Box tonight because we in the Opposition are talking about development and how to get it started again. I only wish that Conservative Members took the same view. Have they listened to the views of their Minister for Overseas Development, or has the Foreign Office not even bothered to explain that the number-crunching in the Treasury is crushing people's lives in the third world? If the Conservative party was to put overseas development in the Cabinet—giving it the sort of priority that the Labour party gives it—the Minister would perhaps have more clout in arguing for more money for the poor.

The 1990s will not be any better than the lost decade of the 1980s unless substantial and comprehensive debt relief is achieved. I accept that it will not solve all the problems of the third world. As Filipinos know, economic mismanagement and corruption, with earthquakes and hurricanes, do enormous damage. But however good the Government, the weather or world markets, there is no chance of stability and prosperity across the south without substantial debt relief. Western Governments must take action now to secure it.

We are discussing a statutory instrument that could be an instrument of debt relief. Our long-term aim is to reduce debt to the level at which developing countries can sustain regular payments without overburdening their economies and their people. The figures in the statutory instrument and in the Bank of England matrix give an estimate of their ability to do exactly that. Our long-term aim should be to reduce debt by the percentages that the Treasury and the Bank of England have supplied. Just imagine—a British Government official guide to debt relief! I am sorry to say that all we can do at the moment is imagine. The Government refused to seize the opportunity to encourage debt relief when they voted down Labour's amendments to the Finance Bill. They are happy to sit back handing out tax relief to commercial banks and to watch the poor of the third world suffer.

Under British tax law, the Government are granting tax relief to commercial banks on the considerable provisions that they have set aside to cover doubtful debts to developing countries. According to this statutory instrument, provisions of about 50 per cent. of toal loans to developing countries will be regarded as bad, and therefore eligible for tax relief. The banks write down the debt in their accounting books and claim tax relief on the so-called loss. In practice, they do not write down the debt, but claim the full amount of the original debt from the

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

developing country. Having protected shareholders by making provisions, they can take a tougher negotiating stance with their impoverished debtors.

The amount of tax relief given on banks' provisions in 1988 is estimated to be about £1·7 billion—more than the Government spent on the entire third world aid programme. It is estimated that, last year, Barclays claimed £305 million in tax relief on its provisions against doubtful country debt; NatWest claimed £395 million; Lloyds claimed £453 million; and Midland claimed £184 million. That must be a ludicrous situation. The British taxpayer is subsidising the profits of United Kingdom banks but discouraging them from using those provisions to reduce Third-world debt. In other countries, such as the United States and Belgium, tax relief is not granted until debt reduction has been agreed by the banks.

Labour's proposal is to make tax relief conditional on the provisions being translated into debt relief. Debts must be written down in practice, not just in the books. If no debt relief is granted within, say, two years, the tax relief should be clawed back. Tax relief is supposed to be for irrecoverable debts. If part of the debt is truly irrecoverable, the banks should be willing to cancel that part.

The tiny change that the Prime Minister, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced in this year's Budget discriminates for the first time between a commercial sale of discounted debt and a sale to the debtor Government, which therefore contributes to debt relief. I welcome that recognition that tax law can be used to encourage debt relief, but the change does nothing to encourage the many other methods of reducing debt servicing, nor to encourage banks to use the enormous provisions already set aside for debt relief up to the prescribed levels.

The Brady plan and this year's World Development Movement report called on Governments to use tax, regulatory and other measures to encourage debt relief, yet the Government, who say that they support the Brady plan, refuse to take even this tiny step. Our proposal would cost the taxpayer nothing and would help debtor nations, yet still the Government reject it. In practice, the proposal might save the Treasury money, as banks would not get tax relief if they refused to grant debt relief.

What objections to the plan could the Government possibly have? Someone may tell me that the charity laws are generous enough and that the banks can claim tax relief if they donate debts to charity, as the Midland bank did to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. However, such donations are insignificant compared with the mountain of debt. I am not asking the banks for charity; I am simply asking that they take their share of responsibility. Surely the tax laws should enforce that responsibility.

Some will argue that the banks cannot afford to give debt relief. Do hon. Members really think that the people in the debtor countries should pay if that means untold damage to their development? United Kingdom banks have now set aside a provision of up to 70 per cent. of their third world loans. They could afford to reduce them by that much if only there were a mechanism to bring that about. In 1988, the profits of the big four United Kingdom banks were £4·4 billion, and around 30 per cent. of that came from international operations. While the Third world suffers, the banks continue to rake in the profits.

Some hon. Members may question why banks should have to share the costs of bad loans. To put it another way, why should millions of people overseas sacrifice their poor living standards, their health and their education to repay loans, many of which have brought them no benefit? Let us consider the example of the Bhattan nuclear power station in the Philippines, which has cost $2·3 billion so far. Loans have come from Barclays bank, among others, and interest payments on the loan are $350,000 each day. That is about $2,000 since I started speaking in this debate.

The power station stands on a seismic fault, and it is far too dangerous ever to be switched on. Just keeping it idle but safe requires 400 engineers. Allegations of corruption and malpractice are still being investigated. The commercial banks expect the Filipinos to pay for that monstrous monument to mismanagement. Why should creditor banks and contractors, who either knew or should have known what they were funding, not take their fair share?

I anticipate that Conservative Members will say, "Oh no. Voluntary debt relief is very nice, but it is not for the Government to intervene. Commercial debt is a matter for creditors and debtors." What rubbish. Governments have been intervening in the commercial debt crisis all along, but to protect the banks and not to help the poor. Taxpayers are already bailing out the banks with tax subsidies. The whole idea of the Baker plan and of the Brady plan was for Governments to support commercial debt reduction even if that were done through voluntary market measures. Debt deals go hand in hand with International Monetary Fund instructions on economic reform and are now often supported by the IMF or by the World bank. That Governments are intervening is not in question. The question is, "Is not it time that this Government started using regulations to help indebted nations instead of just boosting the banks?"

A new instrument of debt relief is essential because the debt relief measures used so far have been welcome small steps, but have not gone nearly far enough. The Brady plan has not even lived up to its own modest expectations. Nicholas Brady was aiming at a 20 per cent. reduction in commercial debt in three years, but the banks have been slow to make reductions in debt and in debt servicing. Hence the estimates of the International Institute of Finance show that debt reductions through debt swaps and other Brady measures in the current year amount to about $22 billion, only 10 per cent. of the total commercial debt owed by Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, David Knox, former vice-president of the World bank for Latin America, warned us only last summer that Latin America needs a 70 to 80 per cent. reduction in commerical debt if there is to be any prospect of sustained economic growth.

For the low income countries not covered by the Brady plan, a reduction in their $6 billion commercial debt is also vital. Although small compared to their official debt, the commercial debts are blocking desperately needed trade credits. The World bank's facility established to buy up those debts from the private banks at high discounts is not working because the banks refuse to play ball.

We must now also consider eastern Europe. Poland is struggling with a $40 billion debt which brings the case for debt relief even nearer to home. Only Government action

will ensure significant commercial debt relief. Only Governments, not banks, can take the lead, co-ordinate the banks and ensure that the burden is shared internationally.

The central point is not difficult to grasp even if the implications are far-reaching. The Prince of Wales made the point well recently when he said:

"Most of all, we have to find a way of doing something about the burden of international debt. I really don't see how developing countries can be expected to achieve sustainable development and at the same time meet huge debt repayments."

If there is to be any hope for development in the 1990s, debt relief is essential. The Government should realise that there are several policies that they could and should implement. First, tax relief on provisions set aside by commercial banks should be made conditional on debt relief. Debts must be written down in practice, not just on paper.

Secondly, new procedures must be established to adjudicate on illegitimate debts involving allegations of corruption such as the $2·3 billion nuclear power station in the Philippines to which I referred.

Thirdly, the Government should consider establishing a special scheme to give additional debt relief to finance environmental protection measures in developing countries. That should apply not just to national parks but to major reforms such as agrarian reform aimed at reducing a country's dependence on exploiting and exporting natural resources and finding sustainable livelihoods for the poor.

Fourthly, Governments should revise the instructions to the IMF and the World bank so that they can be more assertive in pursuing debt reduction.

Fifthly, the Government must back international debt relief initiatives with legislation and regulations that ensure that all commercial banks take their share of the burden.

Finally, new initiatives on commercial debt must be accompanied by substantial action on official debt. The new Trinidad terms are another welcome small step, but they leave out many countries. They also leave out the EEC and World bank debt and they leave too much debt still to be paid by the very poorest of all.

In his speech setting out the Trinidad terms for dealing with debt owed by the poorest countries to Governments and official agencies, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"I would look for a comparable response from the banks in the claims they hold."

If the Government want to show how seriously they take their new Prime Minister's words, they could start translating those hopes into regulations to promote reductions in commercial debt.

10.43 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): We have just heard a pretty lightweight speech. The key issue is what rate of tax relief we should allow.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You are stupid.

Mr. Bottomley: If the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) had been in the House not for six years, as is the case, but for 16 years——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You are stupid. You do not understand.

Mr. Bottomley: If the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) were to listen for a while, he might learn something. In the years he failed to get elected as the Member for Workington, he would have seen the overseas aid budget under the Labour Government being used to build ships for Poland. That was criticised at the time by people in the aid lobby, and most Labour Members felt ashamed at what their own Government had done.

The hon. Lady—if she ever becomes Labour Minister for Overseas Development, whether in the Cabinet or not—should know that her predecessor went to India before 1979 and did a deal with the then Indian Minister for Industry. Off the Indian central plan, they arranged to build a steelworks where it should not have been built in the constituency that the Indian Minister hoped to pick up because he was so unpopular in the one that he was going to have to leave. That is the way the Labour party worked in government.

It is worth recognising that we need a package of measures. I am pleased that the British Government started writing off debt to the poorest countries, and Britain was one of the first countries to do that. I am displeased that we are not meeting the United Nations target to which we are committed. I hope that one of the things that we shall do is to rediscover that we have betrayed our promise of 0·7 per cent. of gross national income. It does not help to have sanctimonius pap from the Opposition and from people who should know better.

According to the *Baptist Times*, the principal of London Bible college, Dr. Peter Cotterell, said:

"the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost 'not for party tricks'".

Next to that article is a photograph of the director of Christian Aid, Michael Taylor, who, in an advertisement for the Labour party—as a private individual, of course, not as the director of Christian Aid—said that he hoped that everyone would support the Labour party. That statement appeared in the *Baptist Times*, and it is similar to an advertisement in the Church of England newspaper, which had a similar open letter from Eric James. On the same page there is a quotation from the Church Army saying that a photograph appearing in one of its publications meant that

"several readers said they would not support its work because 'it was a political act to publish a photograph'".

If that principle works with other political issues, it works just as well when people such as the director of Christian Aid make the mistake of confusing his role in trying to add to the Government's help to Third-world development. The reaction of people such as myself should be to send an extra donation to Christian Aid and point out that the man has made a mistake, and perhaps on reflection he will begin to recognise it.

Having spent some time on the Select Committee which examined overseas development, examining the Labour Government's record and using the same criteria to judge the present Government's record, I know that it is clear that more needs to be done. Part of that process is to see whether commercial institutions such as the banks will continue to lend money overseas. If there is no way of dealing with doubtful debts, they are not likely to lend more money. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley, in her 20-minute speech, signally failed to deal with future lending by banks.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: She made five points—didn't you hear?

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Member for Workington should try to listen with his ears rather than his mouth. During the Workington by-election the hon. Gentleman went around shouting off in his own constituency and failed to get elected. If he goes on like that, he may fail to get re-elected next time.

The hon. Lady failed to deal with future lending by commercial banks. Unless there is a way of dealing with the tax consequences of doubtful debts, they will be unable to do so. That is a purely practical point, which is no doubt above Labour Members' heads. There is the general point about overseas development and about grants and loans.

It is clear that much of the money that other countries need will have to be either in grants or in low-interest loans. It is wrong that domestic difficulties in the United States, in this country and in other countries in Europe, which have led to higher interest rates than expected, should have added significantly to the cost of loans given or provided to industries in other countries or to their Governments. It is better to face those facts openly than to try to twist the debate, which is on a specific tax point, into a general overseas development debate.

The problem with the overseas development debate was faced by the World Development Movement 10 years ago, when it was saying—as I was—that we should meet the 0·7 per cent. target, but three months before, it put out a call to everyone in Britain voluntarily to provide an extra £20 a year. Only 600 people provided that £20 voluntarily, and that is only one third of the extra sum that we are asking from the 56 million people of the United Kingdom. Unless and until we can give a better lead with our voluntary donations, we shall find it difficult to keep the Government up to the mark on their public commitment.

I hope that in future, when we have a serious debate on overseas development, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley will take a slightly different approach. I hope, too, that the hon. Member for Workington will try to join a serious movement which is concerned with taxation and with our obligations as a part of one world to those who are like us, but who are not living in the United Kingdom with the benefit of the economic growth that we have enjoyed over the past 10 years.

10.50 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I shall restrain myself and not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). It is only right that we in this place should be constructive on the issue.

Only about four hours ago, when a debate was taking place on the common agricultural policy, it was possible to draw a vivid contrast between the enormous sums that was then being discussed—80 per cent. is directed to intervention while 20 per cent. goes to the farmers, and in this country 80 per cent. of the subsidies go to 20 per cent. of the richest farmers—and no response to the needs of the Third world. There is an astonishing difference between the sums that deliberately we throw away in funding the CAP and those that we make available to the Third world.

I wish to direct a few remarks to the newly underdeveloped countries of eastern Europe. We have an as yet recognised debt to that part of Europe. The Conservatives milked the position in which it found itself——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman must have regard to the terms of the regulations.

Mr. Flynn: I wish to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said about using the tax system as an instrument for assisting with debt relief. Every one of the eastern European countries is very different from its neighbours, but loans are being paid and I hope that we shall make loans in future. The collapse of eastern Europe will involve us within the terms of the motion and in terms of future policy. It is——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The regulations deal neither with future situations nor with hypotheses.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I help my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Paul Flynn.

Mr. Flynn: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: There will be authorities and organisations in eastern Europe that will have borrowed and that will be unable to service their debts. Those who have lent to them within the United Kingdom, who take the form of banks, will probably claim relief. It is probable that such claims have already been made under the regulations that we are discussing. I refer my hon. Friend to the first paragraph of the explanatory note, which sets out the position and the background to the argument that he advanced.

Mr. Flynn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

The scale of the dilemma that faces eastern Europe is one that is not recognised. We can use our tax system and tax instruments to aid the countries of eastern Europe in the repayment of loans and to encourage joint ventures.

The countries of eastern Europe face the triple task of building democracies, becoming independent and creating new market systems. In addition, they face the consequences of a collapsing Soviet economy, with all the lines of supplies and materials coming to an end. There is also the Gulf crisis, which has increased the price of oil to an almost impossible level for eastern Europe. I urge Conservative Members to understand that the know-how funds that the Government have made available to only a few countries amount to a modest contribution that is entirely out of scale to the disaster that is about to overtake eastern Europe. They should look at the problems of eastern Europe, particularly the Soviet Union.

The Conservative party has long had an infatuation with, and a belief in, the infallibility and omnipotence of Mikhail Gorbachev; only now is it finally recognising that he is responsible for economic chaos in that great empire. Some 13 of the 15 republics have announced that they wish to leave the empire and have some scale of independence. They all believe that they are putting a large piece of meat in the pot and receiving a small piece out of it.

While I realise that the instrument applies primarily to the banking system and the enormous problems of the third world, I urge the Government to recognise the magnitude of the problems emerging in eastern Europe.

They should use our taxation and banking systems in an imaginative and creative way to help those countries and aid them in creating their new democracies.

11 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I am pleased to be speaking in the debate.

Two relevant events have occurred in the past two months. The first was when I visited Sussex university with some of my hon. Friends. We attended a week-long seminar at the institute of development studies and considered third-world problems. The overriding message from the academics and experts was that the third world's position is decreasing year by year.

Secondly, my interest was stimulated by correspondence from Christian Aid setting out its campaign on banking on the poor against third-world debt. It is worthy to bring that message to the attention of all parliamentarians, despite the words of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). This is too important a subject to start putting one side against the other. Let us consider Third-world debt and our own responsibility, and fashion a policy that will help the third world. The debate should be taken forward on that basis.

A quotation that aroused my concern was uttered by one of the Catholic bishops in south America, the general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, Bishop Federico Pagura. He said:

"The debt is killing and it is killing in earnest, literally thousands and thousands of people in Latin America."

The link between that statement and tonight's debate is that when we are aware that our high street banks and tax relief system involve some of the creditors who show no mercy, we simply cannot ignore the challenge. We must look at the systems of tax and tax relief if we are to help third-world countries. Another phrase used by a Churchman from Latin America was that we are all on the Titanic, but some of us are travelling first class. We are travelling first class, but to the same end as the other travellers if we do not heed the position of the Third-world countries.

As a result of the Christian Aid campaign appeal, I wrote to every church in my constituency, contacted the local Christian Aid branch through its secretary, Tim Rhead and received responses from the third world. My message to the Churches is to write letters to me so that I can seek meetings with the relevant chairmen of banks in Scotland and England, put the constituents' case to them and send the Minister the letters from the concerned Christians and constituents so that action occurs as a result of Parliament.

The hon. Member for Eltham spoke of 600 responses, which is a problem. But we should try to obtain 6,000 or 60,000 responses. We can do that tonight by highlighting our concerns about the third world and starting a campaign to arouse the interests of the commercially minded in the banks and the Government.

Third-world countries have suffered greatly since 1975. We all know about the quadrupling of the price of oil. Mexico is repaying £1 billion in interest every month, and it still owes more than it borrowed in the first place. The effect in Mexico, Brazil and other Third-world countries has been that, since the mid-1970s, their income has dropped by 20 per cent. Fewer children in those countries go to school, and UNICEF estimates that the debt crisis is costing about 500,000 young lives a year.

That catastrophe can be reversed only if something is done about the burden of debt. I echo what the hon. Member for Eltham said about Governments of the past, of whatever hue, having been responsible for the catastrophe. I beg the Government, because they are in power now, to do something positive.

Pastor Reginald Knowles of the Alexandria Christian Fellowship in my constituency lived in Guyana until a few years ago. He writes to me that it was a British colony until 1970. During his stay there he saw many sights that touched him deeply:

"A child sleeping on the pavement next to its mother. Another child whose arm had been chewed through by a rat while he had been a patient in the Georgetown hospital child surgical ward."

He says that he spoke to some

"nurses who were so demoralised with their pay—98 Guyanese dollars a week compared to the cost of an 8 oz jar of coffee, at 175 Guyanese dollars."

Given the increased lending by banks since the 1970s, and the drop in the price of commodities produced by third-world countries in the early 1980s, those nurses cannot even afford a jar of coffee.

That good pastor and his congregation have decided to send a full-time voluntary worker from my constituency, Ruth McEndoe from Dumbarton, to set up a charity.

I have not given the Minister notice of my next point, so it would be unfair to expect an immediate answer from him. Pastor Knowles says that the IMF and the World bank are engaged in an economic recovery programme that is due to provide $1 million in the form of grants, with the promise of another $2 million to come. Pastor Knowles says that there has been no mention of support for Guyana from Britain, and considering our past colonial links with that country, we should be ashamed of ourselves. What does the Minister think of that?

We should help countries such as Guyana in south America. We could invest large sums if only the banks could be persuaded to release the money. Banks are extremely important in all this. I do not want to score party political points, but it is a pity that the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) is not here, since he is chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland. I shall write to him in the next few weeks, mentioning that British taxpayers are bailing out the banks.

Britain's four major high street banks, Lloyds, National Westminster, Midland and Barclays last year claimed relief for provision against Third-world debt that may eventually cost the average taxpayer £62·80. The Inland Revenue allows banks to claim relief at a rate of up to 35 per cent. on money set aside from their profits as insurance against bad debts in the third world. In 1989, the big four set aside £4·5 billion for that purpose, generating almost £1·7 billion in tax relief. That relief allows the banks to have their cake and eat it, providing them with public money to shore up their financial position but allowing them to continue to demand that countries such as Mexico pay their debts in full.

A tiny minority of debts have been reduced, but Third-world debt continues to grow and is spiralling. The banks are being subsidised by taxpayers, not for cancelling debts, but merely for assuming in the accounts that debts will not be repaid. Sad to say, the level of that public subsidy is higher than the amount that the Government spend on overseas aid. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) spoke about that. Official

[Mr. John McFall]

development assistance in 1989 was £1·5 billion, costing each taxpayer £62·54. The tax relief to the big four banks was equal to £62·80 from each taxpayer.

In 1989, Lloyds set aside £1,763 million of debt provision. At 35 per cent. that represents tax relief of £617 million, equal to £24·49 for every taxpayer in the United Kingdom. National Westminster set aside £990 million, and tax relief on that is equal to £13·75 per taxpayer. Barclays bank set aside £983 million, and tax relief on that amounts to £13·65 for every taxpayer. Midland bank made a provision of £846 million, equal to £10·91 for every taxpayer. Those four high street banks set aside a total of £4·5 billion and received tax relief of more than £1·5 billion, resulting in £62·80 from each taxpayer. In the name of decency and morality, the Government should look at that and change the tax relief system.

I mentioned Brazil and Mexico. Brazil's foreign debt stands at US $120 billion, the biggest such debt in Latin America. No interest payments have been made since July 1989 and the Brazilian Government have said that none will be made for the remainder of this year. The Brazilian economy relies on huge imports of oil and is certain to be hit hard by the Gulf crisis. The Economy Ministry has calculated that this year's oil bill will be at least US $1 billion higher than forecast.

All concerned parliamentarians plead with the Government to do something about those problems. I leave the Minister with a Christian sentiment from Christian Aid. The bishop of a small industrial area near Rio de Janiero, Mauro Morelli, said:

"In the gospel the bread was blessed, and divided for 5,000. In Brazil 5,000 people produce the bread and one person takes it."

We are party to that shameful state of affairs. On behalf of Christian Aid and the concerned Churches in my constituency, I plead with the Minister to look at the issue and say that that is no longer acceptable. He should then do something to help Third-world countries and show that Britain has some morality.

11.8 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I have heard some good speeches by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), especially on social policy and in the great debate in the early 1980s on child benefit, but I was appalled by his speech in this debate. I hope that, on reflection, he will apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). His approach was quite disgraceful.

The explanatory memorandum at the back of the statutory instrument states:

"These regulations provide the method of determining the 'relevant percentage' in relation to a debt owed to a company . . ."

I understand that the arrangements prior to the introduction of this instrument have been helpful to the banks. The statutory instrument that we are debating will help the Exchequer. The Labour party argues for a policy that will help the borrower.

The problem with the statutory instrument is that while it deals with some of the lenders' difficulties, it fails to deal with any of the borrowers' difficulties, the most important of which is invariably debt reduction. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley referred to an example of such a borrower, who was lent money by Barclays bank, which I understand in one year was able to claim £300 million of relief. No doubt, if I am wrong, it will write to tell me so. The example is that of the Bhattan power station in the Philippines, and it illustrates what is wrong with the arrangements for loans.

The power station cost $2·3 billion to build. I understand from research carried out by my hon. Friend's staff that it is not operational, and that the repayments on the loan, which was made by a number of organisations, including Barclays, are $350,000 per day. That is happening in a developing country with unstable political institutions and it is a classic example of what happened in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Arab countries used London and other international financial markets to recycle petrodollars, and the banks receiving those dollars spent them irresponsibly on investments, many of which could not be justified on reasonable economic and commercial criteria.

The problem is that, wherever those investments have taken place, and in whatever projects they have been invested, they have only added to political instability. The burden of servicing the debt invariably falls on the taxpayers or, if they are fortunate, on rescheduling, although many of these countries are not in a position to reschedule their debts. The repayments swallow a large proportion of public expenditure, so that expenditure that should go on social projects does not, which in turn heightens social tension and creates the political instability that many of my hon. Friends hope to see avoided.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said, 46 per cent. of the budget of the Philippines is spent on servicing its debts to overseas banks and other commercial institutions. The United Kingdom has an annual public expenditure of £200 billion. If we had to pay such a large proportion of it in that way, £90 billion would be spent on servicing debts. It is an unreasonable burden for those countries to carry. If we were supporting a £90 billion debt-servicing arrangement, there would be a revolution. There would be gross political instability and violence in our streets. Governments would shake, be removed, replaced, and removed time and again as a result of the difficult social conditions. *[Interruption.]*

Conservative Members may laugh if they wish—I do not object to that—but such things are inconceivable in our democracy. To some extent, the reason why we have a democracy is that we do not have a level of debt which requires such a level of public expenditure to service it. The absence of such debt provides political stability at home, but a debt on the scale of that carried by the Philippines can only undermine that country's Government. That is why there have been repeated attempts to bring down the Aquino Government.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman may recall that this country did have crippling levels of debt, but we paid it off.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister is trying to score a political point. It is true that we have had large debts that we have had to repay, but never on the scale carried by Third-world countries—and never on such a scale that it threatened our very political stability.

I wish to relate the implications of that form of debt to another part of the world—eastern Europe—where huge political changes are taking place. I am sure that the Government are as aware as the Opposition of what might

happen if things went wrong. We see nightly on our television screens demonstrations, shortages of food, problems with distribution systems, and lack of managerial expertise in the development of market economy and private enterprise companies—all the deficiencies that we know make for political instability.

What worries me is not so much that money is going to eastern Europe—we want that—but that it will go into the wrong projects. If it is left completely to the free market, the danger is that the Bhattan nuclear power station syndrome could extend to parts of eastern Europe. Projects may be justified on some commercial basis, just as those managers who flew out of London in the early 1980s to invest petrodollars in other parts of the world somehow found commercial justification for the decisions that they were taking and the investments that they were recommending. That might happen in eastern Europe on a similar scale.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My shoulders are, I hope, broad enough to accept the insults that the hon. Gentleman doled out at the beginning of his speech. Had he listened rather than talking during my speech, he would have heard me say that we had been through this before. He is warning us of important issues. I raised the subject of what happened in the 1970s in an attempt to avoid it happening again, and I cited the two examples of eastern Europe and the Indian sub-continent. I hope that hon. Members will pay attention to this part of the hon. Gentleman's speech, as he is making an important point.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I did hear the hon. Gentleman refer to those matters, despite my sedentary interventions.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on the implications of the statutory instrument for investment in eastern Europe. Perhaps there will not be an investment on the scale that exists in other parts of the world, but the danger is that we might go down that road. Perhaps the Minister will comment on the extent to which we monitor decisions on commercial investments in eastern Europe. Due to a lack of knowledge of how the market works, decisions could be taken, involving large amounts of money, which might at the end of the day need to be bailed out on the basis of a statutory instrument such as the one that we are now debating.

11.19 pm

Mr. Maude: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say that I was mildly chided by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) for the brevity of my opening remarks, but I spoke briefly because I spoke only about the regulations that are the subject of the debate, not about a number of other areas relating to the vexed issue of debt to which those regulations naturally lead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made a powerful speech, which carried all the more weight because of his long record of speaking out courageously on such issues. His remarks about Christian Aid were particularly cogent because of his long experience as a trustee and director of it. The House should listen with considerable respect to what he says.

There has been a good deal of talk about other debt initiatives; other things that should be done to sort out the problem. The Government have played an active role in supporting debt initiatives—contributions to the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, support for the Paris club, our own debt initiative leading to the Toronto terms and the new Prime Minster's Trinidad initiative—all of which have been widely welcomed and are extremely valuable measures. We supported the Brady initiative which has led to substantial bank involvement in restructuring agreements in, for example, Mexico, the Philippines, Costa Rica and Venezuela. All that is important, but it has been done on a sensible and hard-headed case-by-case basis.

The idea that blanket debt forgiveness does any good is crazy. Where countries have got themselves into substantial economic difficulties, the voluntary undertaking by Governments of a proper adjustment programme to get their economies back in order must be a condition for any programme of debt restructuring. It is no kindness simply to forgive debt and allow economies to go on being mismanaged in the way that has led to the problems arising in the first place.

It was difficult to connect what the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said with the image that the modern Labour party has sought to project—taking an interest in things such as markets, and so on. She sounded like an old-fashioned capitalist conspiracy theorist; it was all a plot got up by the banks in order to drag hapless innocent Governments into debt so that they could be sucked dry for ever more. The level of bad debt that has arisen is not such as to lend credence to the view that there has been a hugely effective conspiracy.

The fact is that the banks are a very convenient whipping boy for the Labour party. The venom with which the hon. Lady spoke about the banks, as though they had been going around forcing Governments to borrow money against their will when that was the last thing they wanted to do, would be laughable were it not that the circumstances that we are talking about are so serious.

What the Government have done has not been hugely dramatic, but it is commendable and it has made a significant difference. The regulations are an important measure. They lend certainty where there has been uncertainty and will help the countries which have some of this debt.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does the Financial Secretary deny that, during the 1970s, a large amount of this debt was run up by some fairly aggressive selling by the western banking institutions to the third world countries concerned? It is not right for him to place the blame—if blame has to be placed—entirely on the shoulders of the borrowers rather than the lenders, as he is seeking to do.

The hon. Gentleman has made no attempt to explain how the Treasury arrived at the matrix figures that it has put before us in the regulations. They are broadly in line with those in the Bank of England's matrix, but differ substantially—both up and down—on a country-by-country basis with the secondary market value of the debts of the countries in question. Can the Financial Secretary say how the Treasury arrived at its figures, and is he confident that they represent a proper and realistic assessment of the debts of the countries concerned?

Mr. Maude: There is no such thing as perfection in a calculation of that nature. However, the regulations were issued in draft form for consultation, and most of the representations received in response were contained in the

[Mr. Maude]

final draft. As to aggressive selling, it takes two to arrange a loan—one to lend, and one to borrow. And all of the borrowing was voluntary.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Debts of Overseas Governments (Determination of Relevant Percentage) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 15th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL

Ordered,

That any new Clause relating to capital punishment of which notice may be given not later than 12th December in respect of the Criminal Justice Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House; and that, when the Committee of the whole House have reported with respect to any such new Clause and the Standing Committee on the Bill have reported the Bill, the Bill be proceeded with as if it had been reported as a whole from the Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

St. Quentin's Castle, Llanblethian

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

11.26 pm

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am grateful and pleased that I was successful in the ballot for an Adjournment debate, because it gives me a chance to raise a matter of considerable importance not only to my constituents but nationally, and which has national implications.

I have just returned from making a site visit to St. Quentin's castle at Llanblethian, near Cowbridge, in my constituency, where I discussed with local residents, members of the history society, and other eminent individuals the threat under which that historic monument has been for many years. They are all gravely concerned about the castle's future, because its features include what is probably the only surviving gatehouse of its type. Comprising three storeys and underground vaults, it was built in the early 14th century, but still has two complete rooms.

The gatehouse is threatened by overgrowth, exposure to the elements, and because for no fewer than 30 years nothing has been done to protect or restore that important monument. It is a unique architectural example, and has a commanding view over the ancient borough of Cowbridge and the village of Llanblethian. It was built by Gilbert de Clare in the early 14th century, but sadly not finished because he fell at Bannockburn before construction of the castle was completed. It was inherited by the Lord of Glamorgan, who was the keeper of the realm in the actions of Edward II. That would, in common parlance, classify him as the deputy Prime Minister of his day. The castle was then taken over by a distinguished Glamorganshire family of French origin, the de Spensers, and has a fine tradition. It was lived in for hundreds of years before becoming a prison, and then served as a local amenity and open space for the people of Llanblethian until the 1960s.

So distinguished is the castle's history that we have managed to collect considerable support for its protection —not least from the recently deposed deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), once Member of Parliament from Port Talbot, whose family emanates from that part of the world. The campaign has also been supported by Lord Parry of Neyland, my predecessor Sir Raymond Gower, and most Members of Parliament whose constituences are adjacent to mine. That shows that this issue is not only important but all-party and, indeed, non-political. I hope that the Minister will be able to give me some good news tonight, and tell me exactly what he and the Welsh Office intend to do. We have waited too long to find out.

It was 30 years ago that the Llanblethian community council first raised the matter with the Ministry of Works. The council was worried about the deterioration of this fine castle as a result of decades of neglect. Since then, the local history society, the borough council, the Women's Institute, the old Cowbridge borough council and Vale of Glamorgan borough council—and local residents, in a voluntary capacity—have all striven in their turn, and have used every official channel and every proper means available to them to ensure that works were carried out. Nevertheless, they failed.

One of the reasons for that failure was the fact that the land was acquired, in or around 1964, by a new owner who took over from the old family of Mansell Evan Edwards. In my view—and in that of most of the people who have tried to protect the monument—the landowner has deliberately obstructed their efforts. He has not co-operated with the bodies, both Government and voluntary, which have tried to get something done on the site, and despite every encouragement and inducement over a considerable period, not one piece of work has been carried out to protect, restore or renovate the building.

That is formidable record, and a disgraceful one; so disgraceful, indeed, that, in November 1983, the Minister himself, when he was Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Wales, informed my predecessor that the Welsh Office had decided—presumably as a last resort—to acquire the castle and the site by compulsory purchase, with a view to carrying out immediate repair and renovation to protect the building. I stress the word "decided"—it was not a question of consideration. Now, almost exactly seven years later, not a thing has been done to protect the castle. We face the onset of winter, with frost, wind and rain, all of which will damage the fabric and structure of the building; yet it seems that, once again, nothing will be done.

In the past 15 months, I have involved myself in the campaign. In view of his early involvement in the matter, I wrote to the Minister of State to find out why the land had not been acquired, and what the Welsh Office intended to do about carrying out works and gaining access to the site. In April this year, the Minister wrote to me saying that the agents of the current landowner appeared to be very co-operative—or words to that effect—and seemed to have every intention of doing something; the Welsh Office therefore wished to give them the opportunity.

That will not wash. I believe that there have been at least seven efforts at drawing up programmes of repair in conjunction with the landowner, but he has no intention of carrying out any such work. Indeed, he is making a fool of the Welsh Office and running rings around Ministers—I could cite several examples to prove that.

Following the letter of 1983 to which I referred, Cadw said that the owner could not be traced or contacted. In 1976 the Department of the Environment referred to not being able to get access to the site. The minutes of a meeting of the Vale of Glamorgan borough council in 1983 recorded that it appeared that the landowner had no intention of co-operating with the Welsh Office to restore the building.

It seems that the landowner in question acquired a number of sites in the area—probably cheaply, considering the price of agricultural land in the mid-1960s—with a view to developing, and I believe that that is his view to this day. He is prepared to see that great monument deteriorate, and even be destroyed, so that he can develop there, as he has tried to do on land which he owns in the area and which, if it was deemed housing rather than agricultural land, would be worth a great deal of money.

Lest the Minister and his officials at the Welsh Office have any doubts about the landowner in question, we have a duty to draw attention to some of his activities and some of those of his family. They represent what I consider to be the unacceptable face of property developers, using tactics that we thought were well behind us and would not be considered acceptable in this day and age.

The brother of the chap about whom I am talking has a well known reputation in the nearby town of Penarth for openly destroying classic pieces of Edwardian architecture. He knew that what he had done was illegal and that he would be fined, but the fine bore no relation to the crime committed, so he was happy to destroy two buildings. He was the owner of a hotel of international acclaim in the same area, but some years ago it mysteriously burned down, much to the horror of the people of the area. I understand that he is currently facing action in the courts for committing an act of vandalism to part of our heritage—another unique piece of architecture.

The owner of the site to which I am drawing attention has a reputation such that local residents and activists are afraid to approach him. He is known for threats and strong-arm tactics. It is a sad and disgraceful record. They do not appear to me to be the sort of people with whom Ministers and the Welsh Office should be seeking to co-operate. As I said, they are running rings around Ministers and functionaries at the Welsh Office. The members of Cadw are also being made to look absolute fools.

I am not here tonight to castigate individuals, although in the last Session I tabled early-day motion 1007 which, being supported by some of my hon. Friends, criticised the Minister. I did so with some regret because, as he knows, I have much respect for the Minister, but I felt that we could not allow the situation to continue. It makes a mockery of the role of Government and of attempts to try to protect our heritage. I did that with a heavy heart, but I felt that it had to be done to continue to draw attention to this serious matter.

We must act quickly. The state of the castle, which I visited today, is worrying. Foliage and trees are growing from the structure of the building, and although it is a three-storey monument one can hardly see it because of the overgrowth. There is no fence to stop young children entering, so I presume that it is a dangerous site and that a serious accident could be caused. However, I do not want to give the landowner the excuse of allowing it to reach such a state that it has to be demolished and lost for ever. If we do not act quickly, we shall lose this fine monument, its architecture and its history. I do not think that the people of my constituency and of Wales would forgive the Welsh Office if it allowed that to happen.

Finally, I shall highlight what we are up against. I was recently in the area and, quite by coincidence, bumped into some American tourists who were, I am glad to say, staying there. The castle, of which they were aware, is a tourist attraction, but if it were restored it would be a far better tourist attraction. In discussing the problems that we face in trying to protect the monument, they could not believe that we could allow our heritage and our children's heritage to be threatened in this way. They have seen part of their heritage and indigenous culture destroyed. Many of the pioneers of north America left their heritage and history behind them. What would they give to have a castle 800 or more years old, built on original remains and with a history to be proud of oozing from it?

The castle has stood in that community for 700 or 800 years, but seven or eight years of inactivity, red tape and bureaucracy in the Welsh Office has allowed this unscrupulous landowner to get away with what he has been getting away with for the past 26 years. It is an outrage that a building which has stood for so long may be destroyed in such a short time.

[Mr. John P. Smith]

I make a plea for the Minister to act, to acquire the site and the castle compulsorily and to undertaken the necessary repairs immediately.

11.43 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) for raising this issue and for giving me the opportunity to set out the facts in this far from straightforward case. I have some news for him this evening.

St. Quentin's castle, on the outskirts of Cowbridge in South Glamorgan, is a scheduled ancient monument within the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. As such, it enjoys statutory protection and, as with all scheduled monuments, work on it cannot be carried out without special permission from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. St. Quentin's castle is in private ownership.

St. Quentin's is a quadrilateral castle with a fine central gatehouse built in the 14th century for Gilbert de Clare, who was killed at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Typically of many monuments of that period, which have not benefited from a strategy for conservation, its general condition is poor. Tree growth and ivy have taken their toll.

The condition and custody of St. Quentin's castle have been a source of local concern for some 30 years. Nearly 10 years ago, particular concerns were expressed that the monument was deteriorating and in response to local anxieties, including representations from the late hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan, Sir Raymond Gower, we looked very carefully at what might be done to safeguard its future. In 1983, I wrote to Sir Raymond and told him that my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State had decided to seek the compulsory acquisition of the monument to ensure its long-term preservation.

Such action would have been a drastic step in that it would have involved denying the rights of a private owner. Indeed, during the passage of the 1979 Act, an undertaking was given to the House by the then Labour Administration. During the Bill's Second Reading, Mr. Kenneth Marks assured the House that powers of compulsory acquisition would never be used except when it was the only way of securing the preservation of a monument. That has seemed to us a sensible test and it is an undertaking that we have been happy to honour. The circumstances in which the powers to which I refer are used should be rare and the arguments for doing so must be fully tested. I think it would clearly be wrong to take action before other options had been exhausted.

At that time, we judged that the action referred to in my letter to Sir Raymond was appropriate. Restoration works had not been undertaken for many years and there seemed little likelihood that they would be. As a result, we had first to identify the legal owners—which was not without its difficulties—and secondly, to put it to them that they should carry out repairs. The owners' response was to tell us of their wish to take forward restoration—to a high standard—of the castle in their stewardship. Those assurances were renewed periodically as we went back to ask why action had not been taken. That work of any consequence has not been carried out is a great disappointment and, in that, I share the frustrations of local people who value St. Quentin's.

During this year, there have been extensive discussions with the owners' agent. They culminated in an application for consent to undertake a programme of restoration work. That was received in early April and our formal consent was issued on 5 July 1990. The Vale of Glamorgan borough council has, we are told, been consulted on public safety and on the force of tree preservation notices. Those matters are very much for it and for the owners. A tree surgeon has provided advice on clearance of ivy and other vegetation that covers the castle. Regrettably, work has yet to start and, despite promises from the owners' agent that a programme of works would be shared with Cadw, no action has been taken. Our offers of grant assistance have not been taken up. In view of that, we have had to consider what further measures we might take to deal with the castle's plight.

The House will wish to be assured that officials from Cadw have met local people with a special interest in the site to advise them of our actions. The matter has also been considered by the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales at its summer meeting. Hon. Members will know that the board is our independent statutory advisory body on such matters.

To guide our deliberations, we asked for an up-to-date and detailed survey of the monument by the Department's specialists. The survey revealed that, while the structure of the gatehouse was generally sound, there were loose joints in the masonry at high level that required attention. Following a site meeting in October with the owners' agents, officials reported to us that there was no immediate prospect of an early start on the site and that with the approach of winter there were parts of the monument's fabric that needed to be dealt with more urgently.

As a result, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that, in the absence of works carried out by the owners, it was essential to use his statutory powers to undertake urgent repair works to St. Quentin's. The necessary legal notices have been dispatched. The hon. Gentleman will know that I have been closely in touch with the matter for some years and have kept him informed of all but those very latest developments. I have corresponded with him and, most recently, copied to him my letter of 21 November 1990 to Mr. Wayne David MEP.

The House will recognise from what I have reported that the welfare of an ancient monument cannot be safeguarded without due regard being paid to the interests of private owners. In considering this case, we have had to keep in view the physical condition of the monument. That we have done throughout the period since I wrote to Sir Raymond. We are satisfied that the owners have had every opportunity to carry out the urgent works for which our consent has been granted.

We are also satisfied that, unless action is taken now, the integrity of the monument will be threatened. That is why staff from Cadw's directly employed labour force will enter the site to undertake a programme of urgent works. Those works will comprise the removal of tree growth and ivy at the upper levels to the gatehouse and treatment of masonry to prevent its collapse. It will take about two weeks to complete. The cost of that work will be met by the Welsh Office.

That action is evidence of our regard for St. Quentin's castle. Once completed, the works will prevent further

deterioration of the monument for sufficient time for its future to be further considered with the owners. I do not rule out the use of compulsory purchase powers if that proves to be the only way to safeguard the monument. There remains, however, a range of options open to us short of that and we shall be exploring those further. It would be our preference to secure the monument's future through a voluntary arrangement, possibly through a guardianship arrangement, but the option of compulsory purchase will remain closely in view.

The Government are firmly committed to the protection of the built heritage. We attach considerable importance to the protection of sites such as St. Quentin's castle. Our action in carrying out repairs to that monument using Cadw's staff is clear evidence of that commitment.

We sometimes share the frustration of those who wish to see action taken without any delay, but we in Government cannot ride roughshod over the interests of the private owner. That is why we have been extremely patient in the case of St. Quentin's. We have afforded every opportunity for the owners to take forward the good intentions that they have consistently expressed. Indeed, I am convinced that the undertakings given to the House during the passage of the legislation required nothing less. We have allowed that opportunity and we are now taking action, which I believe the hon. Gentleman will welcome.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

FRASERBURGH HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Fraserburgh Harbour: And the same was read the First time, and ordered to be considered upon 11 December and to be printed. [Bill 18.]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Vehicle Mileages

1. **Mr. Ilsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to introduce measures to record vehicle mileages and prevent the sale of unroadworthy vehicles.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked me to apologise for his absence; as the House will no doubt be aware, he is otherwise engaged in Brussels at the GATT negotiations.

In answer to the question, the Government intend to tighten up certain aspects of the law relating to the sale of unroadworthy vehicles and appropriate measures will be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. There are, however, no plans to introduce any statutory requirement to record vehicle mileages.

Mr. Ilsley: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. A 1987 survey conducted by trading standards officers showed that about 77 per cent. of older vehicles were unroadworthy and another survey showed that about 20 per cent. of hire vehicles were unroadworthy. That means that about 1 million of the vehicles traded annually are classed as unroadworthy because they have not qualified for an MOT certificate. Bearing in mind what the Minister has said and as trading standards officers now have powers to inspect vehicles under the trade descriptions provisions and in respect of credit arrangements, will the Minister be giving trading standards officers further powers to inspect vehicles for safety—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] Will he also give further consideration to recording mileages at Swansea?

Mr. Leigh: Trading standards officers already have to administer no fewer than 30 Acts of Parliament and 900 sets of regulations. Unlike Opposition Members, the Government are not convinced that tying up the measures with further red tape will do the industry any good at all. It is already an offence to sell unroadworthy vehicles.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that a large number of the second-hand vehicles that are sold have been clocked? Is he aware that a number of garages in the King's Lynn area have made representations to me about their grave concern about clocking of second-hand vehicles? Surely, one way forward would be to have cars manufactured with milometers that could not be put back or tampered with in any way.

Mr. Leigh: I certainly undertake to take my hon. Friend's proposal back to the Department and consider it carefully. My hon. Friend will be aware that there is already a large body of law that protects the consumer. It is already an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, the Road Traffic Acts and the Sale of Goods Act 1979 to clock vehicles.

Joint European Research

2. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had on British companies' participation in joint European research projects.

Mr. Leigh: My noble Friend the Minister for Industry has responsibility for research and technology policy. He attended the recent Research Council of EC Ministers on 20 November and discussed EC research and development issues with his ministerial counterparts and the European Commission.

Mr. Jones: What action does the Minister for Industry propose to take to help ICL compete for European research money now that it has been taken over by Fujitsu?

Mr. Leigh: We raised the matter in writing with the responsible Vice-President of the European Commission. My noble Friend the Minister for Industry, who now represents the United Kingdom on research and technology issues, met the Vice-President to discuss the matter on 20 November. He was reassured that, for the purposes of collaborative research, the company would continue to be considered to be a British company.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend confirm that British companies take about a fifth of the European Community research funds available for industrial development? Does not that show clearly that, when they are playing on a level playing field, British companies are well able to hold their own in the European Community?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and makes a very good point. We should always remember that the main spur to research is not what Government do but the profitability of industry. Industry's funding of research and development increased by nearly 50 per cent. between 1983 and 1988. My hon. Friend makes a fair point.

Financial Services

3. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom financial services sector is able to compete fairly in the single European market.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): The financial services industry in the United Kingdom is a great success and I am sure that it will do extremely well from the wider European market that is now being constructed and in which we are participating fully with our partners. The Government are doing their bit by negotiating constructively on a number of measures to create the right framework for the wider industry. At the moment, we are negotiating on the financial services directive and the complementary capital adequacy directive. We are also working closely with the Commission to get passport directives on both life and non-life insurance.

Mr. Dunnachie: We welcome the single European market, but we and others in the insurance industry worry about the unfair competition facing our companies from the German, Italian and French conglomerates. What is the Minister doing to ensure a level playing field for our British companies?

Mr. Redwood: Of course we want a level playing field for all companies in the European Community. That is the purpose of negotiating fair rules of conduct, such as those in the directives that the Commission is now proposing. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the Government will battle hard to get a fair deal for our companies and for customers throughout the Community. If only Opposition Members had equal dedication to the purpose of creating an open and liberal market in Europe, that would make it even easier for us.

Sir Robert McCrindle: Could my hon. Friend give us a little more information about the progress that is being made with the capital adequacy directive? Are we any closer to achieving the position in which small to medium-sized financial intermediaries in this country will be allowed to continue to provide the service that they provide at the moment, bearing in mind the fact that the position in other European Community countries is very different from that which has always prevailed in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is important for this country and for the European market as a whole that there should be a fair regime allowing independent financial advisers to carry out their important work. The United Kingdom Government have worked closely with the Commission to identify different categories of adviser for capital adequacy purposes, but we believe that their capital requirements should be related to the risks that they are running.

Under the current draft, investment advisers will not be required to provide any capital for that purpose, but will still gain access to the passport. We are now working on the question of how much capital those advisers should have who also handle client money and arrange deals for clients. That is still an issue of contention in Community negotiations. My hon. Friend can rest assured that we wish to see a flourishing independent financial advisory sector in this country and that we do not wish the directives to damage it.

Ms. Mowlam: The Minister just said that he is keen that British competitiveness should be enhanced in the single market, so I am sure that he agrees that it will be enhanced if his Department acts swiftly and efficiently when dealing with fraud when it is based in the City. In that context, what has the Minister done about the problems and financial difficulties at Hamilton House, which have now been with us for over three years? More specifically, when did his Department last receive communications from the regulators on this issue and what did the Department do?

Mr. Redwood: I do not intend to go into the details of individual cases across the Floor of the House in such sensitive issues. The hon. Lady knows that we are keen to pursue fraud and malpractice wherever it may be. It was this Government who introduced powerful new laws and regulations to do so and we have brought a number of cases to court for that purpose. We are seeing again today that Opposition Members are interested only in fraud and malpractice. That is not the way to represent the United Kingdom's financial services industry to the wider Europe.

Mr. Dunn: Will my hon. Friend confirm that some European Community member states impose controls and restrictions on cross-border insurance services which are not necessarily in the interests of the policy holders and which, in the end, only reduce competition and increase prices?

Mr. Redwood: As my hon. Friend says, there are a number of barriers in the insurance market. One of the points we are trying to get across in the early discussions on the possible directives is that there is no need to regulate product specification.

The important thing is to regulate the solvency of companies and the fit and proper nature of those running them in carrying out the business. I hope that we have success in persuading our colleagues in Europe, because it is in the interests of all forward-thinking companies and customers in the wider Europe that maximum choice and competition is offered.

Manufacturing Output

4. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

Mr. Leigh: The Government promote continued growth of manufacturing industry with policies such as reducing rates of tax on profits, privatisation, deregulation, elimination of restrictive practices, trades union reform and negotiations to reduce trade barriers through the general agreement on tariffs and trade and in the European Community. In addition, my Department continues to operate a range of schemes to improve business performance under the enterprise initiative.

Mr. Battle: When the regional Confederation of British Industry and the Leeds chamber of commerce predict a bleak mid-winter for manufacturing as a direct result of the Government's policies, does not that suggest that those policies are not working? What practical action will the Government take to arrest the manufacturing decline in

Leeds? Will the welcome, positive developments in the finance, service and business sectors be at the expense of engineering, printing and textiles, and costed in rising unemployment in my constituency?

Mr. Leigh: What a pity it is that Opposition Members always want to talk down British industry. They fail to say that, in the past decade, output in manufacturing has increased by a quarter, compared to what happened under a Labour Government, when it fell. This Government recognise that manufacturing output depends critically on profitability and competitiveness which, under the Government, are at record levels.

Dr. Blackburn: Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to pay a warm and generous tribute to manufacturing industry in the west midlands, which is still buoyant, particularly the hand-cut crystal glass industry, which is worthy of commendation?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is a fine champion of British industry, particularly industry in the west midlands.

Mr. Hoyle: If the Minister would reflect for a moment on his foolish remark that the Opposition are not concerned about manufacturing industry, he might realise that in the 1980s, 30 per cent. of it was destroyed by a Conservative Government and we are once more in a recession, with manufacturing industry going to the wall. Would not it be more positive if he were to make representations to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reduce interest rates, which would give manufacturing industry the boost that is sorely needed under this Government?

Mr. Leigh: It does not help argument in the House for hon. Members grossly to overstate the case as the hon. Gentleman has done. He failed to say that, in the medium term, the prospects for British industry are excellent due to the completion of the single market and the creation of new markets in eastern Europe. He also failed to say—and I shall repeat the point because he clearly was not listening to my earlier answer—that, contrary to what Opposition Members would have one believe, manufacturing output has increased by a third under the Government. Moreover —I am happy to go on giving the Opposition statistics —manufacturing productivity and export volume are 60 per cent. higher after a decade of Conservative Government.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that all the simplistic interventionist formulae and subsidies were tried and failed in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s? Will he remind them again that, the last time they were in power, manufacturing output fell, whereas in the 1980s, when this Government meddled less in industry, manufacturing output not only rose, but did so faster than in any other European country?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes his point very well.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Minister confirm that manufacturing output is down by £1·5 billion in one quarter? Will he also confirm that, with jobs losses in steel, aerospace and hundreds of small businesses, Britain has suffered a loss of 2 million manufacturing jobs under this Government? Why are the Government compounding their high interest rate errors by cuts in training, technology and regional incentives? Now that we have a change of Prime Minister, what changes will there be in industrial policy?

Mr. Leigh: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what is happening to British industry. Overall, employment in this country is at record levels, with 27·5 million people in work.

The hon. Gentleman talked about this year; I shall give him some more statistics, as he is clearly a glutton for them. In the first three quarters of this year, manufacturing output was still 25 per cent. up on 1980, and productivity is up considerably. Surely that is a record of which to be proud. It is important that we should not ditch our policies, as Opposition Members would, and that we persevere because they are the only policies that will result in keeping down inflation—the single greatest barrier to competitiveness in British industry and to creating real long-term jobs.

Sir Hal Miller: Will the Minister confirm that, far from the Opposition's suggestions of a decline in engineering being true, the motor industry is increasing production to export and is planning to double productive capacity over the next three years? Will he and his right hon. Friend ensure that the industry's efforts are not frustrated by attempts in the European Community to limit exports of British-made vehicles to our Community partners?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend makes his point very well. An interesting recent study shows that output in car manufacturing will shortly rise to a record level of 2 million—we can be proud of that. I certainly acknowledge my hon. Friend's point; as he knows, we make it vigorously to the European Commission.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

5. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Uruguay round of the GATT talks.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is this week leading the United Kingdom delegation to the ministerial meeting in Brussels called to conclude the Uruguay round of trade negotiations. While the outcome remains uncertain and many difficult issues have still to be resolved, success is in our view essential to maintain and strengthen the multilateral trading system. We are working with our Community partners in Brussels this week to bring this about. The House had a debate on the Uruguay round on 23 November.

Mr. Allen: Is the Minister aware that every family in Britain pays an unseen and unauthorised tax of £15 a week to sustain agricultural subsidies so as to ensure that Christian Democrat and Conservative small farmers re-elect the same Governments in Europe? Will he have a word with the Secretary of State in Brussels and ask him to consider seriously the United States Government's proposals to reduce agricultural subsidies and support throughout the world, so that the bill paid by British families can be reduced?

Mr. Sainsbury: I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's enthusiastic support for an open trading

system, because that is what we believe in. I hope that I shall have that same support if we start talking about textiles.

Sir Peter Hordern: Is my hon. Friend aware that the common agricultural policy is the biggest single obstacle to the success of the GATT round? Does he agree that it is time to get rid of a policy that does not help the farmer and places an intolerable burden on every family in Europe?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend should recognise the fact that, although agriculture is important to achieving a successful outcome of the Uruguay round of the negotiations, it is not the only matter at issue. We hope that a flexible approach by the Community to the offer on the table, which is a good offer, will enable progress to be made on other areas of great importance, covering the whole range of exports of goods and services, which represent about a quarter of the output of British industry and commerce. All those elements can benefit from a successful outcome. If we concentrate solely on agriculture, we mislead ourselves as to what the round is about—but I agree that we must adopt a flexible approach.

Mr. John D. Taylor: As the objective of the European Community is that we all speak with one voice, does the Minister think that that should be seen to happen in practice, especially in negotiations in connection with GATT? Does he agree that the Government's decision yesterday to break rank with the rest of the Community is downright disgraceful? Will not that damage the interests of the United Kingdom's agriculture and weaken the Community's negotiating stance at these talks?

Mr. Sainsbury: I do not recognise what the right hon. Gentleman is talking about. He speaks about the need for the European Community to speak with one voice. As I am sure he is well aware, the Community is the negotiating party in the GATT round. Of course, I hope he will agree that before the Community speaks with one voice, it would be sensible for the members of the Community to discuss and agree what is to be said by the Community on their behalf.

Mr. Favell: Does it strike my hon. Friend as ironic that the European Commission, which is supposedly dedicated to free trade, should be suggesting a common economic and fiscal policy and a single currency at the same time as its flagship, the common agricultural policy, is jeopardising the whole of the world's free trade? Goodness only knows what would happen if there were a common defence policy and the Community were in charge of sending British troops to war.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important for the Community to show that it is able to make progress on issues for which it has been responsible for a long time, such as agriculture, before taking on fresh responsibilities. I hope, and I know that my right hon. Friend who is in Brussels also hopes, that flexibility will be shown at the meeting that is due to take place in about two and a half hours. I hope that we will be able to make substantial progress across the whole range of subjects being discussed.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Given the importance of the world trade talks to many industries and services and the seriousness of a breakdown, will the Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister has talked to Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand, or will talk to them at their joint meeting today, to see whether at the highest level a positive and constructive European initiative can be agreed in order to avoid deadlock?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I have just said, there is a meeting at 6 o'clock Brussels time, 5 o'clock our time, of Trade and Agriculture Ministers of the Community. I have every hope that that meeting will cover the whole range of subjects being discussed. The Commission intends to put to the Ministers attending that meeting the progress that has been made. As a result, I hope that the Uruguay round will be able to go forward to a successful conclusion and that there will not be any damage to the prospect of a successful outcome because of a lack of flexibility in agriculture negotiations.

Mr. Riddick: Textile manufacturers in my constituency and throughout the country are concerned about whether the Government are taking a sufficiently tough line on the negotiations over the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement. Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the Government and the European Community will take an extremely robust line to ensure that export subsidies and tariff barriers, which are holding back British exports, are done away with? British textile manufacturers are not afraid of free trade as long as it is fair trade, but we need a level playing field.

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that we very much recognise the importance to our textile industry of better market and export opportunities because it is a successful exporting industry. He invites us to take a robust line. We are doing that in seeking reductions not only of tariff barriers but of other obstacles, including the subsidies to which he refers, so that we can create a more level playing field.

Shipbuilding

6. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met his European counterparts to discuss shipbuilding.

Mr. Leigh: My noble Friend the Minister for Industry represented Her Majesty's Government at the Industry Council on 26 November at which the seventh directive on aid to shipbuilding was adopted unanimously.

Mr. Orme: Did the Minister on that occasion raise the question of Cammell Laird, a shipyard which is crucial to the economy of the north-west of England and to thousands of workers? Did he ask for intervention aid and raise that matter with the Commissioner? People in the north-west want to know what the Government propose to do about the survival of that shipyard.

Mr. Leigh: The future for Cammell Laird is not strictly relevant to the seventh directive, but I will answer the right hon. Gentleman, because this is a serious and important point. We are lucky to have such a hard-working local Member as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), who has been doing tremendous work trying to help the company to find orders. I also pay credit to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) who, as always, takes a positive and sensible view of such matters.

The problem with Cammell Laird, as the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) is aware, is that it was agreed that the shipbuilding intervention fund would not be available to Cammell Laird. We have been back to the Commission and argued the case on behalf of the company, but we received a firm no. Subsidies will not be available to the company. It would be counterproductive for me to offer any hope that the Commission is likely to change its mind.

Mr. Frank Field: While we do not want the Minister to offer baseless hope, will he undertake to return to the Commission and specifically raise the matter of individual orders for which the company requests intervention fund backing? Does he accept that his negotiating position has changed as the negotiations on the seventh directive have progressed? At the beginning, it looked as though the jobs in the naval yards were secure, but it now appears that the 22,000 jobs in the naval yards will collapse to just over 8,000. On that basis, in this last month of negotiations, should not the Minister go back to the Commission and argue the British case to defend those jobs? If he fails to do that, not only will Cammell Laird suffer, but the Minister will have locked the whole of British shipbuilding into further decline.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman's first question was also put to me yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey. I am prepared to give the commitment that the hon. Gentleman asked for. I will go back and ask the Commission to waive the rule for particular orders, but I must be honest and say that, so far, Sir Leon Brittan, on behalf of the Commission, has given a very firm no. However, we will try again.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Minister assure us that the Government are not out of line with our European partners in relation to subvention for shipbuilding? Does he realise that the majority of our European partners would like to see subvention remain at about 20 per cent. for at least six months and then, if it must be reduced, have it reduced in a structured way and not by the massive 50 per cent. currently proposed?

Mr. Leigh: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in these matters. Indeed, he is leading a delegation to see me this afternoon. We are anxious to help Harland and Wolff in every way we can. It would be unwise for me to speculate on the outcome of negotiations that are still proceeding on the automatic degressivity of shipbuilding aid—*[Interruption.]* For those not familiar with European jargon, degressivity is the year-by-year cut in subsidies to shipbuilding. I repeat what I said in the debate on shipbuilding—it is extremely unlikely that aid will be cut to below the 10 per cent. margin. It will be somewhere between 10 and 20 per cent.

Dr. Godman: While the small Ferguson yard in Port Glasgow is thriving, principally because it recently signed an order with assistance from the intervention fund, the economy of the lower Clyde would be transformed if Scott Lithgow were allowed to compete successfully for orders for large ships. As that yard has been denied access to the intervention fund for more than five years, does the Minister recall the Commission's amendment, which he quoted the other day, to the effect that after five years a shipyard may be given access to the intervention fund? Will the Minister give Scott Lithgow's case the most serious consideration?

Mr. Leigh: We are anxious to help our manufacturers in any way we can and I should be happy to give the most serious consideration to Scott Lithgow's case, but the general position, as the hon. Gentleman hinted, is that the Commission is absolutely firm about the rule of up to five years. However, there may be more flexibility after five years and I am happy to take up the hon. Gentleman's suggestion and go back to the Commission.

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend will be aware that in the past the Commission has changed the intervention rules for specific orders. May I, therefore, warmly welcome the commitment that he has given to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) to go back with a specific request for intervention funds for specific orders?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

The Gulf

7. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the trade consequences of a military option in the Gulf.

Mr. Sainsbury: None.

Mr. Dalyell: With 300 Kuwaiti oilwells detonated, tankers in the Gulf Exoceted, some Saudi and Emirate production missile-eliminated, fire trenches described to many of us by General Colin Powell in a Committee Room last night as incinerated, and the use of nuclear weapons not excluded, what then happens when the price of oil is $120 per barrel on the Rotterdam spot market? How do Ministers reply to today's Oxford survey? What happens then if there is a military option?

Mr. Sainsbury: All that is needed to bring about a peaceful resolution of the crisis is for Saddam Hussein to obey the United Nations resolutions and to withdraw. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] The hon. Gentleman has made clear his concern about these issues on a number of occasions and he has been answered by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my hon. Friend reflected on whether a quick resolution would ensure that we returned to normal trade throughout the region? Have not the high prices brought about by the crisis reduced the consumption of oil and petrol and thus reduced the greenhouse effect that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is constantly talking about?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is aware that the trade consequences of what has already happened have been severe, especially on certain states in the area. The consequences of the rather volatile movements of oil prices are difficult to predict and we shall not know for a little while whether the good consequence of less oil being consumed and less sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere has been brought about. I am sure that the entire House shares the common concern that we should obtain a peaceful solution, but one which means that the United Nations resolutions have been obeyed.

Mr. Cohen: Has not the Minister of State for Defence Procurement's denial of *The Sunday Times* Insight teams report been less than full and clear? Will the Minister——

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Why did the hon. Gentleman not ask that question when I was on my feet?

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister publish the full departmental minutes?

Mr. Bell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Those of us who were trying to listen to the supplementary question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) had our hearing of it interrupted by a Minister of the Crown. Is it appropriate for a member of the Cabinet——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was listening carefully to what the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) was saying. I do not think that anything disorderly occurred. However, this matter was raised at some length on Monday.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister publish the ministerial minutes? Is it not wholly inappropriate for a Minister to be leading the war effort who facilitated, with a nod and a wink, the sale of weapon-making equipment to the Iraqis?

Mr. Sainsbury *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will do the pointing.

Mr. Sainsbury: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the proceedings of the House on Monday as they appear in *Hansard*, when I made a statement on the issues to which he is referring and when a number of questions were answered.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory non-reply to my supplementary question, I hope to raise the ecological consequences of the Gulf military option in a debate on the Adjournment.

Shadow Directors

8. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received representations on the role of shadow directors as defined in the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend asked about measures under the Companies Act. I have had several representations on related issues under the Insolvency Act 1986.

Mr. MacKay: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is strong circumstantial evidence that a number of companies that are running into financial difficulties are being put into receivership because the banks involved are concerned about putting their own people into those companies because they might be defined as shadow directors under the Companies Act? But for that, those companies might have been saved. Will my hon. Friend assure the banks that they will not be prosecuted, provided that they are not involved in any wrongdoing?

Mr. Redwood: I can give that assurance. Under the legislation to date, no banker has been successfully prosecuted for acting as a banker. Only one case has been brought under the legislation and that was withdrawn by the liquidator before being pressed to a conclusion. The reasons for that are evident in the nature of the legislation, which states that the bankers must be doing more than offering advice in a professional capacity. The courts would have to examine the consequences of any action to determine whether it resulted in wrongful trading and whether it made the position worse.

I assure my hon. Friend that it is not the intention of the legislation to frighten bankers who are acting properly, as bankers, in trying to rescue companies. Of course, such matters are subject to test in the court. I shall consider carefully the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is there not another group of shadowy people actively trying to mislead and misrepresent their policies? What representations has my hon. Friend received about recent statements by shadow Ministers? Will he refer them to the appropriate regulatory authority?

Mr. Redwood: I wish that there was adequate legislation to deal with that serious threat. It is of great concern that the Opposition make so many misrepresentations. They claim to be the friend of industry and commerce, yet spend all their time here running it down.

Textile Industries

9. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on Government plans to assist the textile industries.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend is seeking to improve the protection of intellectual property and to strengthen the rules and disciplines of the GATT in a way that will benefit the textile industries.

Mr. Vaz: Is the Minister aware that the British textile industry is in a deep crisis? Is he further aware that in the past six months, 3,500 jobs have been lost—including 85 at the Corals factory in Leicester last Friday? Is not the Government's policy of high interest rates and their failure to tackle import penetration having a dramatic effect on the future of the industry? Will the Minister, as a matter of urgency, convene a meeting with the employers and the unions to fashion a strategy to save that vital industry before it is too late?

Mr. Sainsbury: My many discussions with employers and unions, and my many visits within the industry, lead me to believe that the hon. Gentleman's description of the textile and clothing industry does not bear much resemblance to reality. He says that the industry is in a deep crisis, but its exports this year are 16 per cent. up on the same period last year and it is investing heavily. Naturally, we all regret job losses, but the hon. Gentleman must recognise that many of the reductions in employment are the consequences of the very investment that we all want in the ' stry.

Mr. L am: As an unashamed Tory protectionist, may I pre hon. Friend about the textile industry in tershire and also the multi-fibre arrangement? Will make it absolutely clear that in no circumstances will Ministers allow the MFA to be phased out unless there are satisfactory alternative provisions under the Uruguay round?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that not only are we determined, as has always been the case, to ensure that strengthened rules and disciplines and better market

access accompany the phasing out of the MFA, but that the benefit of those strengthened rules and disciplines and of the tariff reductions in other countries should come into effect when the Uruguay round comes into effect, which we expect to be at the beginning of 1992. The MFA will be phased out over a longish period—just a little less than 10 years—so there will be benefits to the textile industry from the beginning.

Mr. James Lamond: Now that the Minister has made it clear that the MFA is to be abandoned in the talks in Brussels and that the GATT rules are unlikely to be strengthened in the way the industry wants, will he take it from me that it is no use trying to suggest that criticism of the Government comes only from Opposition Members, when employees and employers alike have written condemning the Government for their lack of interest in retaining the textile industry, particularly the spinning end of it, in Britain?

Mr. Sainsbury: I sometimes wonder where the hon. Gentleman has been for the past four years—Glasgow, perhaps. If he has only just discovered the commitment that was made not just by Britain, and not just by the European Commission, but by all the contracting parties to GATT that—as part of the Uruguay round—the MFA would be phased out and textiles, like all other commodities, would be brought within the general rules of world trade, I wonder how much interest he really has in the industry.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that despite considerable improvements in production processes in the textile industry in Leicestershire, there is still a belief throughout the county that a 10-year multi-fibre arrangement is essential? Will he comment further on the threat to British markets of illegal subsidies in India and Pakistan, which is of particular concern?

Mr. Sainsbury: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern for the industry. A good example of the benefits of the Uruguay round is that newly industrialised countries that have been using subsidies, in our view improperly, have agreed to phase out those subsidies in the event of a successful outcome of the Uruguay round. That will be of great benefit to the textile industry and to industry generally. That is one reason why we are determined to obtain a successful outcome and a commitment to phase out the MFA is an essential part of that.

Mr. Henderson: The textile and clothing industry trade association, the Apparel, Knitting and Textiles Alliance, has expressed in a letter to all Members of Parliament its profound concern that the Government are trying to weaken the EC's position in the GATT and the MFA talks. Will the Minister today, in taking the robust line to which he referred earlier, allay those concerns by giving a clear commitment that any phasing out of the MFA will be conditional on a safeguard clause and new regulations on anti-dumping, the protection of intellectual property and reciprocity in terms of open markets in countries closed by excessive tariffs?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that we can be assured that the Opposition share our view that our economy and, indeed, that of the world, would benefit from a more open trading system—a view which the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) clearly shares. I therefore hope that they will support our objective of a successful outcome to the Uruguay round, which requires that we deliver on the commitment to bring trade in textiles within the general rules covering all other trade. As we have always said, that must be accompanied by strengthened rules and disciplines in the GATT system covering matters of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Waller: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the United States Government are left in no doubt about our attitude to the protectionism that they afford to their textile industry? Does he agree that tariffs of well above 30 per cent. not only act as a severe barrier to our exports but lead to the diversion of trade into our markets, which are far more vulnerable to dumping and other unacceptable practices?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that I personally, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and all those negotiating on our behalf have made it clear to the United States that we regard it as unacceptable for a country such as the United States to shelter an industry behind tariffs as high as those to which my hon. Friend referred and that we also regard as unacceptable the offer that the United States has made so far for reducing textile tariffs.

Weapon Components and Research

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new initiatives he plans on the international trade in conventional, nuclear, biological and chemical weapon components and research information.

Mr. Sainsbury: We continue to work with other like-minded countries to take effective action to prevent the proliferation of missiles and nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and to control the export of conventional weapons. In the light of recent developments, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to extend the controls on the export of chemical weapons precursors and on chemical plant and equipment for use for chemical weapons purposes.

Mr. Flynn: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm that such measures have proved so successful in the past that if war breaks out in the Gulf British soldiers will be bombarded with howitzer and mortar shells manufactured using machinery exported from Britain, spied on by British-made radar, shot at by tanks travelling on British tracks, and attacked by missiles propelled by British fuel, all supplied to Saddam Hussein with the help and guidance of British Ministers? Can the Minister give an absolute guarantee that potential future Saddam Husseins are not even now being armed to the teeth by Britain?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that we have one of the world's strictest systems of controlling the export of defence equipment. Furthermore, we adhere strictly to our treaty commitments, which cover the export of nuclear material, and we intend to continue doing so.

Mr. Conway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have effectively controlled export licences for goods which could be used for military purposes, to the

extent that that has had an effect on some companies in my constituency, which had export licences refused to them? Should not those who have evidence to the contrary seek recourse to the law—rather than knock British industry, as Opposition Members do, for cheap party political gain?

Mr Sainsbury: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I assume from the attitude taken by some Labour Members that they would like to ban all defence exports, which would immediately put at risk, if not immediately destroy, at least 100,000 jobs.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: In view of the new-found confidence in the United Nations, which is shared by the British Government, will the Minister look with favour on the proposal, which has the support of Germany's Foreign Minister in particular, for the United Nations to maintain a register of all arms sales?

Mr. Sainsbury: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, that idea has been around for a long time. If such a scheme were to be effective, it would require universal adherence—and that does not yet seem to be obtainable.

Insider Dealing

11. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take in the light of the reaction to his consultation document "The Law on Insider Dealing".

Mr. Redwood: The Government are currently considering the responses to the consultative document, and we will bring forward legislation when parliamentary time permits.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that although insider trading is difficult to prove—as evidenced by just nine successful prosecutions in the past 10 years, not one of which attracted a prison sentence—we ought to strengthen the armaments against insider dealing by, for instance, introducing civil law penalties on the lines suggested by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry as well as by the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board, a remedy which is widely used in the United States?

Mr. Redwood: I cannot agree that we have been unsuccessful in pursuing insider dealing in recent years. Out of 21 cases taken to court, convictions were secured in 12 of them, involving 14 defendants. The Government intend to prosecute any case in which good evidence exists. In sifting through the consultation replies, we shall take on board all sensible advice from whatever source. There may need to be a strengthening of our law in some respects, to bring it into line with the directive—which, for example, seeks to create an offence for insider dealing in Government and local authority securities, which is not covered by existing British law.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the panoply of legislation that the Government have brought to bear on the whole question of insider dealing and regulation of the City shows that the Government care about that area of activity and about regulating it properly, in contrast with the Opposition's lamentable failure to do any such thing when in office? Does he agree that the financial practices of the National Union of Mineworkers, Liverpool city council and other Labour authorities give one no confidence that the Opposition would tackle the subject in the future?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely well. There are worries about financial probity in a number of organisations. The Government intend to use the full force of the law wherever they can do so to root out those malpractices. It is a sad testimony to the Opposition, who are always on about insider dealing, that when they had the power to bring proposals before the House, they did not do so. In contrast, the European directive was in large measure influenced by the legislation that the Government put through the House earlier in their period in office.

Brewing Industry

12. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the Director General of Fair Trading on the implementation of Government regulations on the brewing industry.

Mr. Redwood: The director general is monitoring compliance with the Supply of Beer Orders and he has not so far advised me that any change is necessary.

Mr. Bidwell: Does the Minister realise that many people in the industry are worried about the apparent climb-down by the Government on the brewing industry question? Will the Minister ask the Office of Fair Trading to monitor what are known as swap arrangements in the industry, or is he too mindful of the brewers' donations to the coffers of the Tory party?

Mr. Redwood: The director general has powers to monitor arrangements. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence that he thinks the director general ought to see to help him carry out his task, I suggest that he sends it to him or to my office.

Mr. Butler: With the closure of the largest regional brewer, Greenall Whitley, and with other regional brewers possibly following suit, is not something going very wrong with the structure of the industry? Should not the Monopolies and Mergers Commission reconsider the matter urgently?

Mr. Redwood: The director general is keeping the industry under review and he also has powers to advise my right hon. Friend about any transaction or merger which he thinks might be damaging to the public interest and should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) has been doing an extremely good job for his constituency and the interests of the brewery there, and I have helped him to forward evidence to the director general, who will be advising us and my hon. Friend in due course.

Steel Industry

13. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Steel to discuss the future of the steel industry.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Steel whenever appropriate. Their last meeting was on 7 September and there are no plans for a further meeting at this stage. My noble Friend the Minister for Industry visited British Steel at Port Talbot last week.

Mr. Corbett: Will the Minister persuade his right hon. Friend to meet the chairman of British Steel to discuss the constructive alternatives being proposed by the work force at Ravenscraig and Clydesdale? Is not it disgraceful that a man known as "Black Bob", because he has dug so many industrial graves, is refusing to meet the work force to discuss the future of the industry in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Leigh: Labour Members are always quick to talk down the management of British Steel. Perhaps we should consider the record of British Steel, which is now making a profit of £700 million a year, compared with an operating loss of £1·7 billion under the last Labour Government. It is not surprising that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow spokesman on trade and industry, said at the party conference that the British steel industry is now the most efficient in Europe.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I support the hon. Gentleman's plea for my right hon. Friend to meet the chairman of British Steel. Could he use the opportunity to persuade the chairman to offer the assets of British Steel in Scotland for sale to any interested party, as an integrated whole, before they are chipped away and destroyed under the current management of British Steel?

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that closure is a matter for the commercial judgment of the company concerned, and that remains the Government's position. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland asked the Scottish Development Agency to consider the implications of the closure for the work force. I mentioned the visit of my noble Friend the Minister for Industry to Port Talbot, and British Steel's record in terms of profitability. As my noble Friend is a helpful sort of Minister, he asked them, "What can I do to help?" The management said quite clearly, "Keep out of our business."

Dr. Moonie: The Minister seems totally unconcerned that time is running out for the Scottish steel industry. Does he agree that the Government should step up the search for an overseas buyer for Clydesdale? Will he tell us exactly what Ministers have done to deal with the steel crisis in the six months since the strip mill closure was announced? Now that we have had a change of Prime Minister, is not it time for a change in steel policy—time for action rather than platitudes?

Mr. Leigh: The steel policy that has been maintained by the present Government for 10 years has resulted in a company which 10 years ago was making a loss of £1·7 billion now making a profit of £700 million a year. Why should Ministers such as I be better at picking winners and deciding how to operate British Steel than the directors who have been so successful in turning British Steel into a profitable company?

BILLS PRESENTED

Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco)

Mr. Andrew Faulds, supported by Mr. Alan Amos, Mr. Joe Ashton, Mr. Tom Cox, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mrs. Maureen Hicks, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. John Home Robertson, Miss Joan Lestor, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Stever Norris and Mr. Roger Sims, presented a Bill to increase the penalties for the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 16 years; to make illegal the sale of tobacco to such persons from vending machines; to require local authorities to enforce those provisions and publish reports; to prohibit the sale of unpackaged cigarettes; to prohibit the advertising of tobacco or tobacco sponsored events from retail premises; to require the publication of warning statements on cigarette packages and in retail premises; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 19.]

Pig Husbandry

Sir Richard Body, supported by Teddy Taylor, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Gary Walker, Mr. Christopher Hawkins, Mr. Bill Walker, Mr. Andrew Bowden, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Ron Davies and Mr. Matthew Taylor, presented a Bill to prohibit the use of neck and girth tethers on breeding sows; and to prohibit the confinement of breeding sows in narrow stalls: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 20.]

National Health Service (Compensation)

Mrs. Rosie Barnes, supported by Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Frank Field, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Sir Michael McNair-Wilson, Mr. Alfred Morris, Dr. David Owen and Mrs. Ann Winterton, presented a Bill to provide that persons injured, distressed or subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering during care by the National Health Service may be awarded compensation without having to prove negligence on the part of the National Health Service; to define eligibility for compensation; to establish a Medical Injury Compensation Board and to make other provision for the assessment of eligibility and payment of compensation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 21.]

Public Safety Information

Mr. Steve Norris, on behalf of Mr. John Bowis, supported by Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. James Arbuthnot, Mr. Roger Stott, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. John P. Smith and Mr. Ian Taylor, presented a Bill to give certain bodies duties regarding information concerning public safety; to require the designation of a public safety officer by such bodies; to provide for the keeping of registers of such information; to provide for public access to that information; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February, and to be printed. [Bill 22.]

BADGERS

Mr. Roy Hughes, supported by Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Donald Coleman, Mr. Andrew MacKay, Mr. Richard Livsey, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Steve Norris, Mr. Paul Murphy and Mr. Gary Waller, presented a Bill to make provision for the protection of badger setts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 23.]

COURTS (RESEARCH)

Dr. Mike Woodcock, supported by Mr. Humfrey Malins, Mr. Roger King, Mr. Barry Porter, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. David Evennett, Mr. Ian Bruce, Mr. Keith Vaz, Mr. Michael Knowles and Mr. Gareth Wardell, presented a Bill to make provision for research covering the televising of proceedings in court; and for research concerning trial by jury; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 24.]

ESTATE AGENTS (PROPERTY MISDESCRIPTIONS)

Mr. John Butcher, supported by Sir Robert McCrindle, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Lewis Stevens, Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Alan Williams and Mr. Austin Mitchell, presented a Bill to prohibit the making of false or misleading statements by persons carrying out estate agency business in connection with property transactions: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 25.]

DOMESTIC SMOKE ALARMS

Mr. Conal Gregory, supported by Mr. Stuart Bell, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Mr. Alistair Burt, Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. Douglas French, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Ian McCartney and Mr. Patrick Thompson, presented a Bill to require the installation and maintenance of smoke alarms in private dwelling houses; to provide for financial assistance in certain cases; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 26.]

RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL (ROAD TRANSPORT)

Mr. Dudley Fishburn, supported by Mr. Neville Trotter, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Chris Butler, Mr. Matthew Carrington and Mr. Ted Garrett, presented a Bill to make new provision with respect to the transport of radioactive material by road; to repeal section 5(2) of the Radioactive Substances Act 1948; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 27.]

REGISTERED HOMES (AMENDMENT)

Mr. John Butterfill, supported by Mr. David Hinchliffe, Sir Peter Blaker, Mr. A. J. Beith, Sir David Price, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Sir Robert McCrindle, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. Steve Norris, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. David Evans and Mr. Barry Field, presented a Bill to amend Part I of the Registered Homes Act 1984 so as to require registration in respect of small residential care homes; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 28.]

TRADE DESCRIPTIONS (ANIMAL TESTING)

Mr. Joe Ashton, supported by Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Steve Norris, Mr. Stan Crowther, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Peter Hardy, Mrs. Ann Clwyd and Mr. Andrew Bowden, presented a Bill to require an indication to be given if specified goods have been tested upon animals; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 29.]

CROFTER FORESTRY (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Calum Macdonald, supported by Mr. Brian Wilson, Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. John Home Robertson, Mr. Elliot Morley, Sir Hector Monro, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and Mr. James Wallace, presented a Bill to extend the powers of grazings committees in relation to the use of crofting land in Scotland for forestry purposes; and to make grazings committees eligible for certain grants in respect of such use: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 30.]

ROAD TRAFFIC (TEMPORARY RESTRICTIONS)

Mr. William Cash presented a Bill to make new provision in place of sections 14 and 15 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 22 February and to be printed [Bill 31.]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (PUBLICITY FOR AUDITORS' REPORTS)

Mr. Michael Mates presented a Bill to make further provision with respect to the furnishing or making of copies, and inspection, of auditors' immediate reports made under section 15(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 32.]

EMPLOYMENT (UPPER AGE LIMITS IN ADVERTISEMENTS)

Mr. David Winnick, supported by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Terry Davis, Mr. George Foulkes, Mr. Greville Janner, Mr. Ron Leighton, Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse, Ms. Marjorie Mowlam, Ms. Joyce Quin, Ms. Joan Walley and Mrs. Audrey Wise, presented a Bill to prohibit the use of upper age limits in the advertising of employment vacancies: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 33.]

MOTOR VEHICLES (SAFETY EQUIPMENT FOR CHILDREN

Mr. Michael Jopling, supported by Sir Michael Shaw, presented a Bill to make provision in relation to safety equipment for children in motor vehicles: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 34.]

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE (INSANITY AND UNFITNESS TO PLEAD)

Mr. John Greenway, supported by Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. David Bellotti, Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. John

Cartwright, Mr. Kenneth Hind, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Eddie O'Hara, Mr. Andy Stewart and Mr. Peter Temple-Morris, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the special verdict and unfitness to plead; to increase the powers of courts in the event of defendants being found to be insane or unfit to plead; and to provide for a trial of the facts in the cases of defendants found to be unfit to plead: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 35.]

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment)

Mr. Donald Coleman, supported by Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Peter Hardy, Mr. Roy Hughes, Mr. Elliot Morley, Mr. Geraint Howells, Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas, Mr. Martyn Jones, Sir Anthony Meyer, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and Mr. Gareth Wardell, presented a Bill to amend sections 5 and 11 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 so as to make it an offence to cause or permit the commission of offences under those sections: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 36.]

Parish Councils (Access to Information)

Mr. Roland Boyes, supported by Mr. Kevin Barron, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. George J. Buckley, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Mr. Cecil Franks, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. Martyn Jones, Mr. David Knox, Mr. Keith Mans and Mr. Martin Redmond, presented a Bill to provide for greater access by the public to meetings of parish councils and community councils, and to certain documents and information relating to parish councils, parish meetings, community councils and community meetings; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 37.]

Aircraft (Noise Restriction)

Mr. Terry Davis presented a Bill to make provision with respect to permissible noise levels of civil aircraft operating to and from airports in the United Kingdom; to place upon the Secretary of State a duty of licensing civil aircraft in respect of engine noise levels; to impose restrictions on civil night flying; to increase the extent and scope of noise insulation grants; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 38.]

OPPOSITION DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Poll Tax

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, in view of the large number of hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches between 6 and 8 pm. I hope that those who may be called either before or after those times will bear in mind that general limit.

3.35 pm

Mr. Brian Gould (Dagenham): I beg to move,

That this House asserts that experience has shown beyond doubt that the poll tax is objectionable in principle and unfair and unworkable in practice; concludes that the problems it creates for local taxpayers and for local government cannot be overcome and are getting worse; notes the recent denunciation of the poll tax by many senior members of the Government including the new Secretary of State for the Environment; and urges the Government to have the courage of its changed convictions by recognising that the poll tax is beyond redemption and must be abolished.

I begin by welcoming the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) back to the Dispatch Box and to his new, and perhaps resumed, responsibilities. I offer him a particularly warm welcome to that bed of nails, the poll tax. The right hon. Gentleman's appointment shows that the new Prime Minister, whatever his other qualities, at least has a sense of humour—to be fair, not grey but black humour—although the right hon. Gentleman may have difficulty in seeing the joke. The issue which he made the centrepiece of his election campaign and which was to sweep the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) to victory in the Tory leadership election has been used by his conqueror to shackle him to his failure. He is the first turkey trussed for Christmas this year—indeed, if it is not too indelicate to say so, a turkey stuffed on this occasion with a well-seasoned poll tax stuffing.

The right hon. Gentleman nevertheless deserves some credit. He alone of all the senior Conservatives dared to tell the truth about the poll tax. His denunciations carried conviction because they were true. He had the courage, and he alone had the freedom, to speak out. Where he went, the others dared not refuse to follow. If it were not for the right hon. Gentleman, I have absolutely no doubt that we would still be faced today from that Dispatch Box with the same mealy-mouthed protestations about the poll tax's unfailing virtues. Less than a month ago, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor assured us that the poll tax review was over, that nothing more remained to be done. Once the right hon. Gentleman had dared to speak out, those deceptions could no longer be sustained. Even the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten)—now at least freed from the responsibility of defending the indefensible—has at last been persuaded to confess that the poll tax is a bomb which has to be unpicked.

We cannot, however, be too generous to the new Secretary of State for the Environment. He discovered the truth, or at least decided to act upon it, very late in the day. He happily supported the legislation that inflicted the poll tax on Scotland. At no stage did he vote against the principle of the poll tax in England. During the 1987 election campaign, he made it clear that he would not criticise the poll tax on any occasion, thereby putting party advantage above truth and principle.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his bit of fun. As one of those who voted against the poll tax on Second and Third Reading, and throughout, may I plead with the hon. Gentleman—it is a plea that I shall also make to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—to agree with me that income tax is not a controversial issue, that it is accepted to be a fair tax? Does he not think that we in this House, on both sides, could and should try to find a form of local government finance that is not a partisan matter—one that can be accepted and seen by the people of this country to be a fair and reasonable attempt by the House to establish an acceptable form of local government taxation?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is interesting and constructive. It is a measure of the mess into which the Government got themselves that I believe that they are now incapable of pursuing the course that he rightly recommends. As I shall show, all the sensible options have now been excluded by senior members of the Government. The only sensible option—the one that we have adopted—is now the one least likely to be accepted, because we are there already.

The new Secretary of State's record is patchy, but it is one of shining foresight and perception when compared with that of his right hon. Friend the new Prime Minister. From his earliest days in the House, the Prime Minister revealed himself as being among the strongest supporters of the poll tax. In government, he was deeply involved, as Chief Secretary and then as Chancellor, in the development of the poll tax from his membership of the Committee that first decided to abandon the phasing in of the poll tax in favour of overnight introduction, through his preparation of the package that fought off the revolt that might have carried the amendment of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). During an interview on "On the Record" he confirmed his intimate involvement in the most recent but now apparently inadequate fundamental review. Earlier this year, he was still at it, assuring a constituent that the poll tax

"will be seen to be a very much fairer and more acceptable system."

The right hon. Gentleman's only real attempt at fundamental reform came in his Budget earlier this year, but that was totally flawed by the fact that he forgot about Scotland—a recurring theme in the poll tax saga—and miscalculated the number of beneficiaries and the extent to which they would benefit. No wonder the Prime Minister has been a late convert to the idea that the poll tax is now indefensible. Even when the need to move in the quest for votes for the leadership became clear to him just a week or so ago, he revealed that he had very little idea of what steps could or should be taken. In an interview in the *Daily Mail* on 24 November he said, memorably:

"I don't know what we'll have to do and neither does anyone else"—

the smack of firm government if ever I heard it.

The new Secretary of State has no such difficulty. His problem is a different one. He has no shortage of ideas but a superfluity of them. He is a man who believes six impossible things before breakfast. Ideas spin off the top of his head without thought, preparation or costing. They

are all mutually contradictory and unworkable and are all cheerfully abandoned in turn as new ideas occur to him. As the Prime Minister acidly observed:

"reforms cannot be entertained until they have been prepared, examined, costed and considered."

Those are all things that the right hon. Gentleman has failed to do. There is no such caution for the new Secretary of State.

On 10 May, the right hon. Gentleman set out his stall in an ill-considered article in *The Times*. The ideas that he put forward on that occasion, including his revival of his 1981 peculiarity that there should be a referendum every time a council budget departs from the Government's view, were so bizarre that they were laughed to scorn. The right hon. Gentleman had to run for cover, and not a peep was heard from him for three months. When he finally resolved to enter the fray, surprise, surprise, he had a totally different agenda and a new set of ideas that were equally unworkable and ill thought out.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will the hon. Gentleman put the matter in the context of the Opposition's approach, which, as he knows, has produced no fewer than 65 changes of Front-Bench opinion since spring 1987? Were all those proposals costed, too?

Mr. Gould: I shall come to that a little later. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not unaware of the existence of the excellent document, published at the end of July, setting out our proposals and available from Walworth road at £1·50 per copy. It has been selling well.

The real problem that the Secretary of State faces, however, is that each of his ideas has been categorically slapped down by the man who is now his leader. "Transfer education," he said, "from local to central Government." He suggested that on 14 November, but that idea was torpedoed by the then Chancellor two days later. He said:

"Resources pre-empted by shifting education spending to central government could not be spent on health, pensions, defence or other proper claims on the public purse."

The right hon. Gentleman needed not have bothered: the present Secretary of State had already provided the answer himself. In that same ill-judged article of 10 May, he had written that if such a step were taken,

"the Government might find itself blamed for poor standards and income tax might have to rise."

By 15 November, just a day after the Secretary of State had floated his ill-considered proposal, he was already backtracking, describing it as "a fallback position".

What about abandoning the flat rate principle in favour of banding? The present Secretary of State has spoken in favour of it—indeed, he voted in favour of it. In 1988, the then Chancellor condemned that proposal as having

"deep and damaging flaws that would introduce a whole range of unfairnesses and anomalies that could not be defended."

What about the realistic grant settlement that the Secretary of State advocated in his article on 10 May? There was very little chance of that, I am afraid, when the Prime Minister was still at the Treasury. It was under his regime that local government was again short-changed by central Government grant. The burden is again scheduled to fall on poll tax payers and, as a consequence of that gap, the poll tax bills will rise comfortably—perhaps I should say "uncomfortably"—above the Government's estimate of their likely level.

The problems that the Secretary of State faces do not arise solely from the fact that he has been systematically contradicted by his own Prime Minister. He also has problems with his ministerial team. The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities was, we all recall, appointed to that position to act as a minder for the then Secretary of State. He was a member of the Stasi, in my preferred phrase—someone put there to ensure that there was no backsliding from the sacred principle. He alone still appears to have the courage of his party's former convictions. Less than two months ago, he was asserting to the Tory party conference—admittedly to a less than enthusiastic reception—that the poll tax,

"far from being a vote loser, will be a vote winner and will launch us on a fourth term."

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is delighted to hear his words repeated. Just a month later, he was confidently assuring anyone who would listen that the poll tax "review is now complete", implying that all wrinkles had been ironed out and all the problems solved.

The hon. Gentleman is not alone. It turns out that the new Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Suffolk, Salisbury (Mr. Key), is also a secret admirer of the poll tax. Just two days ago, he almost burbled with enthusiasm when he was asked whether he supported the flat rate principle of the poll tax. In response to the challenge from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), he made it very clear that he was nailing his colours to the mast of that sinking flagship. There is not much evidence in the ministerial team of reforming zeal or commitment to a fundamental review.

But the Secretary of State's problems do not stop there. Contradicted by his Prime Minister, by other senior members of the Cabinet and by his own Ministers, the right hon. Gentleman has also succeeded in contradicting himself. On 10 May, he proclaimed that capping, as a solution to the problem of the poll tax,

"would negate accountability and be an act of centralised political power outside our experience."

However, just two days ago, in his first act in the House as the newly appointed Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Gentleman presented a Bill, for which he then proceeded to vote, which turned the capping screw down even tighter. What hope do we have of a little consistency or firmness of purpose from the Secretary of State?

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): While we are on the subject of differences of view among colleagues, is the hon. Gentleman aware that his hon. Friends the Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) refused categorically to defend the rating system during the Committee stage of the Local Government Finance Act 1988? Since the hon. Gentleman has the Labour party's document with him, perhaps he can tell us from his little booklet—he does not tell us in the motion—Labour's preferred alternative to the community charge.

Mr. Gould: I can well understand why the hon. Gentleman is so anxious to deal with the issue of the poll tax, since it seems likely to prove to be his nemesis when the general election comes. It is precisely because we recognise that the old rating system had some deficiencies —although they pale into insignificance by comparison with the poll tax—that we are proposing a fair, modernised rating system that is brought up to date and made relevant to today's conditions.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: No, I shall not give way at the moment.

I was dealing with the options that have now been closed to the right hon. Member for Henley. Where do we go from here? The right hon. Gentleman may yet surprise us all. He may have up his sleeve a solution that no one has yet thought of—a solution that will leave intact the principle of the poll tax, that will make no demands on public spending but will reduce poll tax bills across the board. As a very wealthy man, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman intends to pay everyone's poll tax bill himself.

However, in reality, there is only one sensible solution. We know—because we have traversed this ground ourselves—that that solution is to restore a property-based tax, to bring it up to date and to make it fairer by linking it to the ability to pay. That is the solution that we advocate in this excellent statement in which we set out the details of our proposals. It enables us to do what the Government should have been doing all along. Instead of going off down the disastrous byway called the poll tax, we should have started with a system that we knew would work, brought it up to date, modernised it and made it fairer wherever possible and in stages.

Incidentally, that solution appears to commend itself to *The Times*, which does not normally support the Labour party. It commends itself also to no less than Mr. John Chatfield, the chair of the Tory-controlled Association of County Councils, who said on 24 November:

"elements of Labour's plan to abolish the poll tax and return to the rates could be an improvement."

That solution also seems to commend itself to and to attract the support of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). It is that one solution——

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Durant (Reading, West) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: No. I have given way enough for the moment; I want now to proceed with my speech, because many other hon. Members wish to participate.

It is that one solution, set out in our fair rates proposal, which would require virtually everyone in the senior reaches of the Tory party to eat his words. It is for that single, bad reason——

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not seeking to make an intervention under the guise of a point of order, because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order in the House for an hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the point of order.

Mr. Bruce: Is it in order for a Front-Bench spokesman to refer to a document that does not come from the House, as I understand it, is not in the Library and to which *Hansard* cannot refer? Should it not be read into the record?

Mr. Speaker: Documents that are not in the Library are frequently referred to. I thought that I understood the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to say that the document was available for £1·50.

Mr. Gould: Spurious points of order are always the last refuge of those who know that they are losing the argument. It is interesting that the Tory party, which for so long demanded to know our alternative, is now so embarrassed because we can show it a workable solution.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East) *rose*——

Mr. Couchman *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I shall not give way any more.

That one solution would require virtually everyone in the Tory party to eat their words, and for that single, bad reason, it is probably the one solution that is unlikely to be adopted. We shall have to wait for a Labour Government before sense can prevail. In the meantime, the Secretary of State is trapped. A Government who care nothing for the chaos and misery they have caused are at last compelled, by the need to save their own skin, to concede that they have made a terrible mistake. Every day that goes by makes that mistake more calamitous, but the Government and the Secretary of State cannot muster a single sensible idea between them about what should be done about it. They cannot even summon up the courage to face the truth: the poll tax is beyond redemption and must be abolished.

The British people will not be fobbed off any longer with further promises of reviews and changes. The Government's policy means that there are always solutions tomorrow, but real and painful problems today. The British people will say, with justice, "The Government have had 11 or 12 years to get the poll tax right; we now know that the truth is that the poll tax will never be right." When the poll tax bills arrive next spring, that will be the final proof—if it is then needed—that the old problems still remain, nothing has changed and the Government remain too arrogant to recognise a mistake in prospect and too weak and divided to correct that mistake when it is brought home to them.

The crisis becomes daily more urgent. The delays and confusion are crippling local government—not a matter that concerns the Conservative party very much. However, the uncertainty about what the revenue support grant should be and what further changes might be made in the poll tax make proper budgeting impossible and imposes an intolerable burden on local authority treasuries. Every day of continued confusion accelerates and exacerbates the already serious problems of collection that are crippling administrations in so many parts of the country.

There is only one thing—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Pointing across the Chamber encourages rather than discourages disturbance. Let us settle down and listen to the debate.

Mr. Gould: I intend to put the Conservative Members out of their misery promptly. They do not like to hear the truth, which is that there is only one thing that the Secretary of State should do to meet the poll tax crisis on his return to the Dispatch Box: commit himself and the Government to abolishing the poll tax and tell us clearly what is to be put in its place. Nothing else will do.

3.59 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Prime Minister and the Government for their decision to undertake a careful and fundamental review of the community charge; and deplores the fact that despite several unsatisfactory attempts, the Labour Party has failed to come forward with any clear or workable proposals of its own.".

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has described the Government's review of the community charge which he has invited me to lead as very thorough, very constructive and very fundamental. It is time to raise the whole tone of this debate—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the Labour party will not rule itself out of our continuing discussions.

The debate is not about who pays how much in each local authority. The issues——

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: The issues involved far exceed the precise financial impact on particular groups or constituencies of this or that local tax. The heart of the matter is the future relationship——

Mr. Eadie: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No.

The heart of the matter is the future relationship between central and local government, and the relationship that local government will have in its turn with its local community, in the fullest sense.

These relationships go to the heart of the sort of society that we have and want to have. I make no apology for putting that issue before the House. The question of the proper relationship between central and local government has lurked beneath the surface of policy making in successive Governments for the past quarter of a century. I believe that it is widely recognised that in those 25 years we have not been able to bring ourselves to look at the structure and finance of our local government as two sides of the same coin.

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: The time has now come to address both issues together.

In seeking to improve standards, central Government have begun to change attitudes to the pursuit of value for money, significantly by the establishment of the Audit Commission, but Government have yet to see sufficient progress in raising the quality of services that many local authorities deliver. In advocating accountability, successive Governments have not dealt with the structural and functional weaknesses to make accountability a reality.

We will not solve this problem unless we are prepared to recognise the proper partnership between the different parts of our democratic system——

Mr. Eadie *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: —and my first purpose must be to try to bring that about. I shall begin with the Opposition parties.

Mr. Gould: Before the Secretary of State goes off on a detour, perhaps he will save us all a great deal of time and trouble by answering the single question that is in the minds of millions of poll tax payers. Will he now commit himself to abolishing the poll tax—yes or no?

Mr. Heseltine: There is a certain—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes or No?"] There is a certain quaintness about the fact that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has not been able to answer any questions in three years, but he thinks that I will give him a yes or no answer in three days. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes or No?"] Let me help the hon. Member for Dagenham and the Labour party.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I shall start with the Opposition parties. If Opposition Members could bring themselves——

Mr. Eadie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) is an experienced Member, and he knows that, as the Secretary of State has not given way, he must resume his seat. There is no point in persisting.

Mr. Heseltine: If Opposition Members could bring themselves to do so, I should like to take this matter beyond the narrow bounds of party political conflict. The country wishes us to try to identify a stable and just basis for the future development of local government and the provision of local services. I should like to explore with the Opposition parties the extent to which we can establish common principles for the future role and direction of local government. *[Interruption.]* The country will not have lost sight of the fact that, when we offer to discuss these matters, all we get is baying and divisiveness. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This debate is of great interest not only to every hon. Member in the House but to many other people outside who may well be listening to it. If this din continues, they will not be able to hear it.

Mr. Heseltine: What I could hear from the Opposition was not worth hearing.

I hope that the Opposition will take my proposal seriously, because it might help them in a material way. If they were prepared to enter into dialogue, it might help them to clear their own minds about the answers to questions that have escaped them for so long. I hope that local authorities will recognise that they have an important role to play. They too must help to improve the climate in order to allow these essential developments to flourish.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Perhaps there was so much noise that the Secretary of State did not hear the question that was posed earlier. Will he answer yes or no about whether he will commit himself to the abolition of the poll tax? That is an easy question. Why does the right hon. Gentleman dodge it?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman clearly heard what I said. I said that, in our review, we wish to enter into a dialogue with Opposition parties to see whether we can find a basis of stability in our future relationships with local government.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): So that we may be clear about the matter, will the Secretary of State confirm that he intends to try to take the issue of the poll tax out of party politics and to go for a second review of both the tax and the structure of local government, even

[Mr. David Blunkett]

though he knows that he has no intention of abolishing the tax? He has no permission to abolish it, on the very simple grounds that it would be the greatest U-turn in political history and a clear admission that we have been right all along.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that I am offering the Opposition the chance to contribute constructively to the establishment of a basis for stability within which local government can operate. It is quite apparent that the Opposition have no interest at all in constructive dialogue, because they can produce only negative proposals.

I hope that local authorities will also recognise that they have an important role to play. They must help us to improve the climate. In the past, I have not been slow to criticise waste and inefficiency in local government. I make no apology for that, and that will continue to be an aspect of criticism. However, I have also paid tribute to the part that local government plays—and should play—in defining and giving expression to our quality of life.

The hon. Member for Dagenham spent some time quoting speeches that I made when I was a Back Bencher. I am not sure whether he was wise to call in aid what Back Benchers say about their party's policies. If the hon. Gentleman listened to what his Back Benchers say about Labour's policies, he would realise that Back Benchers have a degree of freedom and discretion which is at the heart of our parliamentary democracy.

I do not for one moment attempt to escape from the fact that I have been involved in these matters before. Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I have views that I have expressed, and they are on the record. I have always assumed that that is what Back Benchers are for. Today, as Secretary of State, it is my responsibility to start afresh; in doing so, I neither overstate the possible, nor deny the potential.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Secretary of State may or may not be aware that the offer of co-operation was made three years ago, in Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill, when my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made the then Secretary of State for the Environment the same offer. He pointed out the dangers facing the Government, and we told the Government to forget the poll tax altogether. We said that they should take the Bill back and that we should look together at a proper system of local government funding. The Secretary of State's present offer is three years too late. Does his present offer of co-operation include the abolition of the poll tax if it is found to be at fault?

Mr. Heseltine: My position is absolutely clear. We are conducting a comprehensive review, as defined by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In that context, we rule nothing in and nothing out. In that spirit, I believe that the Opposition will come to regret their instant hostility to my offer.

Mr. Malcom Bruce (Gordon): Does the Secretary of State accept that my party believes that his philosophical approach is correct and that we must have a system for local government that will be permanent and which will last? Does he therefore accept that we would be willing to discuss with him all possible options, provided he repeats that no options, including complete abolition, are ruled out?

Mr. Heseltine: I made it quite clear that no options are ruled in and no options are ruled out. The observations of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) are a great deal more statesmanlike than the instant party, divisive views of the hon. Member for Dagenham.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I want to understand what is being offered to me and my right hon. and hon. Friends. The right hon. Gentleman referred to a constructive dialogue. What is he actually offering? Is he suggesting all-party talks or that other parties join the working party? What is he suggesting exactly?

Mr. Heseltine: We can all welcome the thinking man's contribution from the Labour party. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has suddenly spotted the trap into which the hon. Member for Dagenham fell from a million miles. My offer could not have been clearer. I am offering to consult the Opposition parties to see whether we can find a basis of stability for the relationship of this House with local government. That could not have been clearer, and it is recorded in *Hansard*.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for recognising that a variety of views are held by hon. Members who represent different Opposition parties on what should replace the community charge. My party has made that clear with our amendments and in our letter to him. Is the right hon. Gentleman to introduce a time scale for the completion of the dialogue to which he has referred?

Mr. Heseltine: I hope that the hon. Lady will accept my assurance that that matter will be addressed in my speech as I make progress.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): First, I take the opportunity of congratulating the right hon. Gentleman on his return to the Government Front Bench. I can well understand his difficulty in answering the question yes or no, but surely he can answer with a yes or a no the question whether he will extend the poll tax. There still remains one party in Northern Ireland, the Conservative party, whose spokesmen want an extension of the poll tax. It is the only party left in the nation that takes that view. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he will not extend the poll tax to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Heseltine: I said that I rule nothing in and rule nothing out but I hope that the House will understand if I rule out the concept that the poll tax should be extended to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I welcome the Secretary of State's undertaking that nothing whatsoever is ruled out. It will obviously take time to examine such a broad scenario. Can he give an undertaking that, in the meantime, some assurance can be given to the beleagured poll taxpayers that some relief will come as from next April?

Mr. Heseltine: I hear clearly what the hon. Gentleman says, and my answer is the same as that which I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to expand my speech, I think that he will find that these matters will be thoroughly covered.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State has now given way to all the minority parties in the House. I think that it would now be wise to get on with the debate. Hon. Members will have an opportunity later of expressing their views if they are called.

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the House will feel that I have tried to reflect the interests of the House. If I give way further I might be trespassing on what I have to say later. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) might have a small part to play in what I have to say.

Mr. Gould: I have been listening carefully to the Secretary of State. He appears to be saying that he and his party are now so bereft of ideas that they are prepared to come a-begging and to ask others whether they might be prepared to help. As we have already developed a fully worked out position, I am prepared to make a counter-offer, from a position of some strength.

If the right hon. Gentleman would care to talk on the basis of an agenda on which the abolition of the poll tax is the first item, and a proper consideration—with the help of the civil service and the Government's computers—of our alternative is the second item, I am prepared to make available to him, free of charge, our fully worked out proposal. I make a further offer. If the right hon. Gentleman recognises the merits of what we propose, we shall support him in any Division that takes place over any legislation that he brings forward to implement our proposals.

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an additional copy of his party's policy. It contains only one fact—the price, and that is too high. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on a new record. He has been the proud possessor of the ability to move from policy position to policy position at three-day intervals. He has now done that in about three minutes. Having rejected what I have been saying, he now realises—with the assistance of his right hon. Friends—that I was actually giving the Opposition the most generous opportunity that they have ever been offered.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I think that I should continue and say something more about my attitudes towards dealing with the matter.

I yield to no one in my belief that central Government must exercise their mandate; that in the end, power lies in this House. Indeed, all Governments insist that the mandate upon which they were elected should prevail. The Labour party must learn to accept that in opposition, just as surely as they have always accepted it in government.

Certainly, no Chancellor of the Exchequer can tolerate a challenge to his authority to manage the economy with prudence and discipline. No Secretary of State can turn his back on inadequate standards simply because they are administered by a local authority. Indeed, I would go further—I do not believe that this House would have legislated to share so much of its responsibility for financial prudence or for the quality of services if it had believed that local authorities would claim the right to frustrate or undermine the mandate of central Government.

I have made as clear as I can my belief that, with the authority of Parliament, the will of Governments must prevail. However, that clear statement does not and should not close the options for a partnership with local government that provides for civic pride and local initiative; nor should it close the potential for men and women to have their desire to serve their community fully satisfied within their own local authority; nor should it divert our attention in Parliament, or outside in local government, from the responsibility to deliver quality of service and value for money, without which it is the nation and its people that pay an unacceptable price.

I believe that now, far more than appeared possible 10 years ago, the importance of partnership is recognised. For all the rhetoric, and despite all the difficulties in the relationship between central and local government, there is a sense of partnership and co-operation in our inner cities, very much satisfying the aspirations that I held years ago. Despite all the tensions of the past 10 years, central and local government are now able to work together to regenerate some of our worst urban areas. Local authorities throughout the country, of all parties, have accepted the vital role of the private sector in economic revival——

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): The right hon. Gentleman is saying a great deal about partnership and the role that he wants to be developed between national and local government. Would he care to reflect on the fact that, when he was previously Secretary of State for the Environment, the amount of central Government expenditure as a proportion of total local government expenditure fell from 61 per cent. to 52 per cent., and that over the same period there were education cuts of 16 per cent.?

Mr. Heseltine: Those figures are not immediately in my mind. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, when his party was in government, the collapse of local authority council building was imposed upon them by the International Monetary Fund. The reason why our waters and our sewers are in such a state today is that the Labour Government slaughtered the capital programmes. It is nothing short of hypocrisy for the right hon. Gentleman to try to deny what his Government were forced to do by the profligacy of their economic mismanagement.

I repeat what I profoundly believe—that, despite all the tensions of the past 10 years, central and local government can now work together to regenerate life in some of our worst urban areas. Local authorities are working together. Local authorities which told me 10 years ago that the message of involving the private sector was unacceptable are now at the forefront in their plans to do exactly that.

In all our big cities, there are now collaborative projects which show the right way ahead. The Birmingham Heartlands initiative is bringing together the city council, a number of private companies and central Government to regenerate east Birmingham.

In St. Helens on Merseyside, Ravenhead Renaissance is a consortium of private sector companies and the local council. With Government support, it is regenerating a large rundown area of the town.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: In Newcastle, the Cruddas park project to regenerate two council estates grew out of a private

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sector initiative. In Glasgow, there is a striking example of the transformation that can be achieved when central and local government work in partnership with the private sector. If hon. Members doubt the success of that partnership, I urge them to go to Glasgow and see for themselves what is being achieved by partnership between local authorities and the private sector.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: There is now a range of co-operation in the network of enterprise agencies giving advice and support to small companies. The Groundwork Trust is using the enthusiasms of the voluntary sector, the enterprise world and local authorities to clean the rural fringe in many of our older towns. *[Interruption.]* The nation will be dispirited by the Opposition's total indifference to all those major advances.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: For a century, the Opposition have shown a deep embittered resentment at any constructive attempts to bring new life to the inner cities. They have a vested interest in talking down the success of Scotland. Time and time again, when they get the opportunity, they shout down anyone with whom they disagree.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I take a wholly more optimistic view. There has been a change of culture in Britain. Just as the flow of private sector cash into urban renewal has followed from the Government's initiatives, there is now a widening range of opportunities in our run down areas.

It is not simply a question of urban renewal. My Department has to deal with environmental issues. The entire nation is preoccupied with the view that we should develop an international presence in environmental matters. It is gravely damaging——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunningham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Wilson: It is a genuine point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the debate is entitled "Abolition of the Poll Tax". It is not an opportunity for a tour d'horizon to cover the five years during which the Secretary of State has been out of government. May we have your guidance on whether the Minister should address himself to the subject of the debate?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Order Paper, he will see that the Secretary of State is moving his amendment, and that is what he is addressing himself to.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Before we proceed, in what I hope will be good order, I should add that many of those hon. Members who are seeking to intervene are the very same hon. Members who are seeking to participate in the debate. It will be difficult for the Chair to call them if they seek to delay the proceedings in this way.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. As there was no point of order, the hon. Member cannot raise anything further on it.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is really not good practice to seek to intervene in a speech by making a point of order, but I will allow the hon. Member to do so on this occasion.

Mr. Home Robertson: You, Mr. Speaker, drew attention to the fact that the Secretary of State is speaking to his own amendment, which is all about the poll tax. His comments about urban renewal and the international perspective are fascinating stuff, but they have nothing to do with the business before the House.

Mr. Speaker: Every right hon. and hon. Member has a right to make points in his own way. I have heard nothing that is out of order. If the hon. Member will examine the Government amendment, he will clearly see that the Secretary of State was perfectly in order.

Mr. Heseltine: It is inconceivable that one could address the subject of financing local government by whatever means and not be preoccupied with local government structure or the quality of the services for which the money is to be raised. I am glad that, despite the Opposition's totally artificial and almost irrelevant attitude, local Labour councils know that they must co-operate with central Government in the ways to which I referred.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: At the moment, no. The hon. Gentleman does not even pay his poll tax.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the way that he has presented the review, which provides for open and honest consultation, the electorate and others outside the House who are watching this debate will not understand artifically imposed conditions on his offer of discussions, designed to avoid councils participating in what many of them accept is an absolutely necessary reform of local government finance?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The general public will understand exactly the role that the Labour party is playing this afternoon. I greatly regret it, because from my talks with councillors of all political persuasions, I know full well that they want stability. They want to know the nature of the relationship and that it will stretch into the future. The Opposition are trying to frustrate a genuine attempt to find a constructive way forward.

I must refer to one more area in which co-operation is essential in the national interest. Local and central Government have an inseparable role in attracting inward investment—discretionary and footloose—to depressed areas of Britain where jobs need to be created. That will not happen if an alien atmosphere is created by Labour for party political reasons.

In all those matters, it is increasingly obvious that a new relationship is emerging between local and central

Government. Local authorities are beginning to perceive and come to terms with their new strategic role as enabling authorities, as opposed to providers of all services. All that is fostering a new spirit of co-operation at local level, as private companies compete with local services, as owners intermingle with tenants, and as parents and teachers play an increasing role in school management. All those trends are to be welcomed, and are characteristic of the change in attitudes that occurred under the premiership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

The 1984-86 review of local finance, which led to the proposals for the community charge, concerned itself very much with the issue of accountability. It explored the mechanisms of central funding, which produced local tax rates, which bore little relation to local spending decisions. It found that, in many areas, only a minority of voters contributed to the cost of local services, and it found that in some areas much of the extra cost of services was met by those without a vote. That situation had to be addressed.

In practice, under our previous arrangements, many who consumed the local services were paying relatively little or nothing for them. That is why there has been a broad measure of support for the simple idea that nearly everyone should make a contribution to the cost of the local services that they consume. It is not that principle which has caused difficulty.

One thing that I have always made absolutely clear is that there is no quick fix for this problem. For next year, my predecessor announced some important proposals, which will significantly improve the financial position of local authorities and local charge payers. I am now considering the response to the consultation on those proposals. I will place the statutory reports before the House in the light of those comments, once colleagues have considered the matter.

As all right hon. and hon. Members know, there is no prospect whatsoever that a final answer can be designed, passed through Parliament and implemented in under a two-year time scale. A complete solution may require a longer time scale. That is a matter of hard reality. But that is not an excuse for procrastination or delay. The issues involved have been explored many times. I must keep open, however, a proper sense of timing. Our review could well identify a programme, divided into quite different time perspectives. It may well be that what is required is a programme of building blocks, constructed logically and carefully towards a clearly defined objective.

In the context of such a review, it is obviously right to explore why it is that the ambitions originally set for the community charge have not found the necessary degree of public support and understanding.

An argument which is much advanced is that, if the charge had been introduced at a lower level, its underlying principles of accountability and broad coverage of most of those who benefit from local services might have been more readily accepted. We shall consider whether that is true; but there is one truth which cannot be avoided. Local authorities as a whole increased their spending by nearly 13 per cent. this year—and by nearly a quarter in only two years. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that local authorities have sought to use the turbulence of the changeover to mask their spending increases and to pass the blame on to others.

There is another truth. The law is the law. Bills legally issued under the authority of this place must be collected. There can be no dining a la carte with the law of the land. I want to say just a brief word to Opposition Members who hold to the constitutional novelty that they are the arbiters of what is legal and what is not, and particularly that they are justified in refusing to pay. I cannot abide the concept that many on low incomes from limited savings in their twilight years—*[Interruption.]* Of course the Opposition do not care, but we care. I cannot abide the concept that such people should be expected to pick up the tab for those who are elected to this House in the name of the world's foremost parliamentary democracy, and then claim a bogus veto over the mandate of the people. It is neither moral nor fair; nor is it constitutionally justified. The Labour party would never tolerate it from us if we were in opposition, and it is unforgivable that they should allow it to themselves in the present context.

Mr. Nellist: Is it not a fact that, had it not been for the 14 million who have yet to pay the poll tax, the Secretary of State would not be here this afternoon announcing a review suggesting changes or possibly abolition? Furthermore, if the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about people on low incomes, why—despite his announcement of a two-year review—is his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security still imposing on every local authority in the country a £100 million cut in the Government payments made to them to provide rebates for the lowest paid? He is cutting those Government rebates from 97 per cent. to 95 per cent.

Mr. Heseltine: As the hon. Gentleman knows, one in four people receive a rebate. He has asked the wrong question: the question for the House is whether, by majority decision, we create the legislation that governs the country, or whether the hon. Gentleman's entrenched bigotry imposes a veto on what the majority of us decide here. But it is not just a question of the hon. Gentleman's having a veto; it is a question whether a large number of people who are a great deal less well off than he is should be expected to pay for his self-indulgent hypocrisy.

We are determined that the taxes that we advocate should be seen to be fair, and the British public must be persuaded that the arrangements proposed at the conclusion of the review will be fair. Our priority must now be to address their concerns as fully as possible.

Our second priority is to put the relationships between central and local government on a healthier footing—to replace conflict with partnership, preferably within a widely accepted consensus about their proper roles. This is not a debate about complete localism or complete centralism; a myriad of options lie in the middle ground. Some we may be quick to implement, while others will take longer. The task now is to identify what is available, and what will serve us best in the long term. That is why the Government have decided to include in its review issues of structure alongside issues of finance. If we can resolve those matters, there is, I believe, a chance for a new, constructive phase in the development of local government.

In all my consideration of these difficult issues, I cannot escape the fact that some of the greatest moments in British history have coincided with the times of resolve, civic pride and municipal initiative in our great towns and cities. I am therefore determined not to set a rigid timetable for our review. I cannot anticipate what agreements can be found; I can only promise to listen with

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care, to decide, with my colleagues, on the way forward once our review is complete, and then to act with determination. That is the responsibility of Government, and the responsibility that we shall discharge.

4.43 pm

Mr. Joe Benton (Bootle): On the occasion of my maiden speech, let me first thank those hon. Members who have extended a welcome to me, proffered all sorts of advice and helped me to settle in. I truly appreciate that.

Let me also pay tribute to previous Members of Parliament for Bootle—Simon Mahon, Allan Roberts and Mike Carr. I fully appreciate that I follow a long line of Members who were devoted to the Labour movement and to the people of Bootle. I pay particular tribute to my immediate predecessor, Mike Carr, who, very sadly—as we all know—spent a very short time among his colleagues in the House. In that short time, however, he endeared himself to the people of Bootle by showing such diligence, concern and general good feeling towards them. I am sure that hon. Members will wish to reiterate their sympathy and condolences to Mike's wife Lynn, his family and his parents.

In his maiden speech, Mike paid particular regard to education and training. Let me say, on behalf of the people of Bootle, that he was right to do so. I do not wish to be controversial, but Bootle is a classic example of the deterioration of our modern society over the past decade.

Bootle contains a wonderful collection of young people —witty, sparkling, exuberant and full of life. However, the ravages of unemployment have dulled that sparkle, and those young people are now wandering around aimlessly. It is not uncommon now to meet people in my constituency who have had no experience of a working life, despite being in their mid or late twenties. This is a tragedy for this country's economy—but, more important, it is a tragedy for the people themselves, who cannot feel positive and part and parcel of the society and the community to which they belong. That is the real tragedy.

I believe that any Government, of whatever complexion, must apply themselves to the problem. A Government who do not recognise the needs of their young people are doomed to failure in any event.

Bootle has many problems. At least 50 per cent. of the adult population receive some kind of state benefit. That seems a remarkable statistic, but it is true. It demonstrates the absence of an economic miracle on Merseyside. I must make that point, because I am here to plead on behalf of the local people. I am also here to plead on behalf of the 2,000 people in Bootle who are waiting for homes, and the 7,000 in the metropolitan borough of Sefton. All those people face very difficult problems.

It is fortunate that I should be making my maiden speech on the day when we are debating the poll tax. I must agree with what some of my hon. Friends have said: I have heard little evidence from Conservative Members of any discussion about the matter. I am sorry about that, because, on top of all its other problems, Bootle has a problem with the poll tax—not because anyone wants deliberately to confront the law, but because people are genuinely unable to pay.

A remarkable conflict is taking place in homes throughout Bootle, of which I have first-hand experience: law-abiding parents are trying to prevail on their children not to break the law. Meanwhile, the old and the sick must rely on friends and relations to pay their contribution for them. It is inconceivable—it is un-Christian, and a scandal in a modern society—that people should have to condition themselves to live in such a fashion.

I still do not know what the Conservative party's intentions are regarding the poll tax. By the time we vote tonight, I hope that I shall be clear about that. Only one course will resolve the problems in Bootle and elsewhere: the utter and outright rejection and repeal of the poll tax and its replacement by something that takes into account people's ability to pay so that they can be treated with compassion and concern. I believe that that is what the Labour party's alternative to the poll tax proposes.

4.50 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): It is a particular pleasure and honour to follow the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton), who has just made an excellent maiden speech. The tradition that maiden speeches should not be controversial has undergone change, even during the relatively short time that I have been a Member of Parliament. I do not suppose that any of my right hon. and hon. Friends would have expected the hon. Member for Bootle to be other than forthright in setting out the issue as he sees it, and we appreciate that. I am sure that he will be advised by his colleagues that the next time he speaks he may not be listened to in silence, as happened on this occasion.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House will join the hon. Gentleman in his tribute not just to one predecessor but, sadly, to two within the same year. A most unfortunate series of circumstances hit Bootle. Although few of us got to know the hon. Gentleman's immediate predecessor, I worked for a number of years alongside Allan Roberts on housing issues. Whatever may have been our differences of view, I was never in any doubt about the clear and honest way in which he viewed housing issues. He did his bit to try to improve our understanding and knowledge of them. I welcome the hon. Member for Bootle to the House. We look forward to hearing from him on future occasions.

I should also welcome, albeit now in his absence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) back to the Treasury Bench. He is perhaps the best qualified among us to deal with the subject. He will probably find that things have changed in the Department of the Environment since he was last there. Green issues overwhelmingly dominate discussions in the Department, subject only to the issue that we are discussing today. He is well qualified, as an evangelical speaker, to be Secretary of State for the Environment.

If I have any criticism of my right hon. Friend, it is that he was too generous to those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench, taking into account everything that has happened since the 1987 general election. As I said in my intervention, there have been no fewer than 65 changes of position or argument by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. The House will be relieved to know that I do not intend to go into each of them, but I have the information here. They include a local income tax, a roof tax, a combination of both, a floor tax, a supplement on national income tax and a return to the rates—the one tax

that, above all, the Opposition were convinced had to be abolished. For a Labour party supporter it has been a grim journey.

The speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was long on introduction and on peroration but there was a predictable absence of anything in between the two. Nevertheless, the Opposition had the cheek to bring this motion before the House today. In their 1988 policy document on local government finance, they say that rateable values are mystifying and

"out of date, giving rise to all sorts of anomalies."

Despite that, we know what their policy is. In case that be thought to be a purely Conservative viewpoint, may I quote from the *Local Government Chronicle*, a well-respected local government paper, which on 12 October said:

"The end of poll tax would be popular. But its replacement looks expensive and to be as ephemeral."

The debate, however, provides us with an opportunity to debate the issue at precisely the right time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley has already set out how open-minded he is. I trust that, after second or third consideration, Labour Members will recognise the advantage of contributing to that open-minded and open-ended discussion. No one party or any one Member of Parliament can claim to be all-knowing in this area. Far too many other alternatives and options have been offered for us to believe in such a thing as perfection.

I was a member of the Select Committee on the Environment in 1982 when it considered the possible replacement of the domestic rating system. I chaired the sitting that drew up the Select Committee's recommendations, so I bear a heavy responsibility. The Committee said that there was scope for improvement of the domestic rating system, but it rejected wholesale reform. The Committee persuaded the Government of the day to go along with that proposal, but a few years later the Government of the day had other views.

When the community charge first surfaced in 1986 in a Government Green Paper, I made two central objections to it. They are worth reiterating. The first was that, for about 75 per cent. of the population, the community charge would not be related to ability to pay. Secondly —this has turned out to be just as important—there was no consensus for change. Those two criticisms remain.

To take up a suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley, I intend to split what I am about to say between what I believe to be important short-term changes and long-term strategic change. I fully accept that we are not talking about the abolition of the community charge during the next two years. That idea has to be nailed straight away lest hon. Members should proceed on a false premise. Nevertheless, some helpful changes could be made that would improve the present system while the possibility of long-term strategic change was discussed, as suggested by my right hon. Friend.

We must accept that the existing rebate system must move further up the income scale. I know that some of my hon. Friends will put to me the problems that are associated with the poverty trap. I find it difficult to accept that apprentices earning £75 or £80 a week should be expected to pay the full community charge. My right hon. and hon. Friends could quote other cases that damage the operation of the community charge, even in the eyes of those who are its keenest supporters.

I am also worried about the fact that one-income households are denied the opportunity of a rebate for the non-earning spouse, who is not always the wife. I am open-minded as to what proportion of the community charge should be paid, if it is suggested that full eligibility for rebate ought to be denied. We must, however, offer something if the community charge is to gain wide acceptance, particularly among people with relatively modest incomes. I am also concerned about the elderly who live with their relatives. There is justifiable concern about the impact of the community charge upon them.

Let me highlight two important matters. The first concerns the existing system and the other relates to the old rating system. It is possible to envisage a long-term solution by means of which a flat-rate charge of £100 or £150 is paid by every adult over the age of 18. With a flat-rate charge of that kind, people may ask whether a rebate system is needed. However, it would take account of what many people have discovered: that there is support for the concept that everyone should pay something. Such a system would recognise that everybody ought to pay something. It also recognises that, although some 60 years ago there was usually one wage earner in a family, there are now often two, three or more wage earners all enjoying local authority services.

I shall not go into detail about the idea of a property tax, but recent research by the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation and the Institute of Fiscal Studies showed that there is a 90 per cent. link between the value of people's homes and their incomes. I know that there are exceptions and problems such as widows living alone, but there is a considerable correlation. The research said:

"The old domestic rating system, which included rebates to the poor, was closely related to ability to pay, despite claims to the contrary."

As colleagues know, the cost of assessing and collecting the tax is much lower—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear some support from the Opposition, but the research went on to show that the

"administrative and economic costs would be higher under the Labour party, which plans to impose higher rates of property tax on higher income groups."

I am simply pointing out that it is an approach which means that everybody pays something, while retaining a rebating system for the property tax element.

I have always thought that a property tax plays an important role in encouraging a more effective use of property and encouraging movement of small families to smaller properties. I see no harm in that. Almost in contradiction to that, I notice that a survey in March this year showed that only 6 per cent. of those surveyed thought that payment for local government services should be restricted to ratepayers alone. I agree with that, and that is why I have put forward my proposal for a two-tier system.

On structure, there is a growing move across the House towards single-tier local government and a reduction in the number of local authorities. I am looking closely at the suggestion made by several people, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, of a directly elected mayor to run local authorities. A higher profile for a prominent local councillor might reduce the amount of correspondence to hon. Members in the mistaken belief that they are also councillors.

I have tried to keep my speech short, because many hon. Members want to contribute. However, I must mention consensus. For some reason, my right hon.

[Mr. Robin Squire]

Friend the Secretary of State did not consult me, so I prepared my speech in advance of knowing what he would say. As *The Times* pointed out, with the present disagreement across the House and within each of the parties, there is great advantage in hon. Members on both sides being prepared to say, "Yes, we could look at something on which we could reach about 90 per cent. agreement."

There will always be scope for disagreement on the rate of a tax, whether it is income tax or some other tax. However, with a tax of this importance, raising revenue of the size we are talking about, there should not be the sort of divisions that we have seen over the years. In part, that stems from what I said some time ago, which is that the abolition of the original system did not follow broad consensus and nor did the policy adopted to replace it. We can see that more clearly now. I do not want us to repeat that mistake, and I do not think that there is any need to do so. There are sufficient areas of disagreement between the parties over this and a range of other issues to allow for the disagreements to continue but for some consensus to emerge on the intelligent way to fund local government in the 21st century. I do not think that it will be as we are funding it now.

5.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Like the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on his maiden speech. As has already been said, it was forthright and direct. I have some knowledge of Merseyside, having spent some of my early life there, and I understand his concern about what has happened there and the severe scale of the problems that exist. He demonstrated clear and deep local knowledge and a commitment to ensuring that the issues are brought before the House. I commend the way that he did that, and look forward to hearing from him further.

I welcome the approach taken at the outset by the Secretary of State. He is right to say that local government finance is of paramount importance. Given that the Government, whether by force or humility, now recognise that the current system is unsatisfactory, it behoves all parties in the House to seize this opportunity in a constructive spirit and to reach a settlement that will last not for five years but for 50. I can say on behalf of the Liberal Democrats that we will be willing to become involved in constructive dialogue and hope that all options will be taken on board. The Secretary of State made it clear than no option was ruled out. We do not believe that, in those circumstances, preconditions for talks are required. The talks have been set out as an open proposition.

I am concerned that there is a suggestion from both sides of the House that we might return to the rates or some variation on them. Many of us have been through that hoop many times and have heard all the speeches about why rates were unfair. Those who think that they want to stand in front of the British public and defend the reintroduction of the rating system will have a lot of egg on their faces, probably literally, not just metaphorically.

Also, the suggestion has been mooted in one or two quarters that local government finance should be replaced by a levy on VAT. I hope that that will not be pursued. It is not the right connection between local services and local accountability. Also, it would be inflationary and would fall unevenly.

In the context of our amendment, I shall return to the view that a local income tax has a great deal to commend it. I hope that that option will be given clear, fair and objective analysis by the Government and the Secretary of State. I promise that I will not say it again but, during the leadership contest, the Secretary of State was asked why, if he was in favour of banding the poll tax, he would not acknowledge that the way to achieve it would be to introduce a local income tax as suggested by the Liberal Democrats. His reply was that he was not a Liberal Democrat.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that that is not the best reason for rejecting a policy option. It should be considered seriously and in depth. It comes not just from the Liberal Democrats but was a recommendation of the Layfield committee. It works in many other countries, and we will enter into a constructive dialogue about that.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): It is a myth that the Layfield committee proposed a local income tax. It did nothing of the sort. It was strongly in favour of a property tax. It suggested that, in the longer term, one might replace some of the rate support grant with a local income tax. In other words, Layfield suggested as a long-term measure that one might have dual system of taxation, both property and local income tax.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is forgetting that the Layfield committee was addressing the issue in the context of the technology available to it at the time. It made it clear that a local income tax was a developing option. Now that income tax is computerised, a local income tax would be simple to collect, but in 1976 it was not. Even so, Layfield pointed out its advantages.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): As one of the original members of the Layfield committee, I can confirm that it came out clearly in favour of a local income tax, which it said was

"the only serious candidate for a new source of local revenue that could give a substantial yield and, at the same time, maintain and enhance accountability."

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Member. The idea of a local income tax has a great deal of authority behind it. I simply ask the Secretary of State to accept that, if he is serious about a review with no options excluded, that option must be considered and not rejected because of its origins.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): In the new spirit which says that we must consider all options, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the implementation of a local income tax would need to be recovered by units of local government larger than the small district councils or even the county councils that we have at present?

Mr. Bruce: Given our modern systems of computerised technology, I do not accept that that is necessary. The Secretary of State made it clear that he was considering an overall review of local government. Many of us feel that we could simplify local government, and perhaps the two things could go together. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion may be helpful, but I do not think that it is necessary.

Let me put on record some of the changes to the poll tax which are urgently needed and which should be considered in the first phase. The poll tax has tipped the balance against rural areas in terms of where the money comes from and where the services are provided. Because it is a flat rate, which does not take account, as rates did, of lower valuations, people in rural areas are paying the same per head as those in urban areas without having access to the same range of services

All of us who represent rural areas could give examples. One of the more extreme examples, passed to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), is the community of Ardmore, to which access can by gained only be a two-mile footpath. With the possible exception of education, none of the normal services are accessible. Not even social work support services can easily be provided. A crofting couple who had to pay a rates bill of about £20 a year now have to pay more than £400 a year, even though the local authority is in no position to provide additional services. That anomaly should be addressed.

Hon. Members have referred to the immediate problem of the crisis in the Gulf. It has been suggested that local authorities should charge only 20 per cent. for those involved in training for service in the Gulf. That would cost local authorities with a high proportion of service men in their areas—Gosport, for example—a substantial amount. I hope that it will be recognised that those local authorities should be fully reimbursed, because such action, taken in the national interest, can fall very unevenly on local authorities.

The anomaly of second homes is still causing considerable problems. Let me cite an example from my constituency to emphasise the fact that there is a real injustice. More than a year ago, a lady moved to my part of Scotland from Peterborough, where she owned a flat in a sheltered housing complex. She has been unable to sell the flat at any price because of the state of the market, yet Peterborough council is treating the flat as a holiday home, on which she has to pay double poll tax in addition to the poll tax that she is paying to my local authority in Grampian. Peterborough council has offered to enter negotiations with her on the basis that the amount should not be paid until the flat is sold, but she has been in real distress about the level of debt that is accruing. She simply cannot pay.

One immediate relief for which everyone will be hoping is the abolition of the 20 per cent. requirement. If people's income is so low that they qualify for full social security benefit, it is anomalous to require them to pay. Full reimbursement is a nonsensical bureaucratic arrangement, but if people are not fully reimbursed, their hardship is aggravated further. That is the major step that the Secretary of State could take now to increase the acceptability of the tax—in that income range at least—not just to people on the receiving end but to the local authorities, which are finding it impossible to collect the money. Very often, the cost of collection outweighs the revenue that could be accrued.

According to the Government, the rates were abolished in favour of the poll tax to ensure a fairer system. I have here an election pamphlet produced by a certain John Major when he was a candidate in Holborn and St. Pancras constituency. It says:

"The Conservatives believe this"—

the rating system—

"is unfair and will abolish domestic rates within a normal parliament. We shall replace them by a more broadly based tax, relating to people's ability to pay."

The Prime Minister must now realise that the poll tax does not satisfy the criteria that he then identified.

It is worth reminding the House what happened. We had a rating revaluation in Scotland—something that Governments have not dared to do in England since 1973. The five-year review in Scotland caused such an outcry among Conservative voters in Scotland that the Scottish Office and Scottish Ministers approached the Cabinet and said, "Please give us an alternative." Scottish Ministers who now claim that the poll tax was imposed on them by their Cabinet colleagues will have difficulty in justifying that claim. We are waiting with interest to see how the Secretary of State will fare in the convoluted changes that he now faces.

When the present Secretary of State for the Environment was asked why he had not opposed or objected to the poll tax in Scotland although he opposed its introduction in England or Wales, he said, "Because I thought that Scotland wanted it." In future, the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister will have to be very careful not to confuse the voice of the Conservative party in Scotland with the voice of the Scottish people. There is little correlation between the two. Had they recognised that in the first place, the difficulty might not have arisen.

On last year's poll tax, the Scottish local authorities face a shortfall of £142 million, or 14·7 per cent. Allowing for the amount that was budgeted for in respect of non-payment, the shortfall amounts to £98 million, or 11 per cent. We are talking not about this year but about last. This year, the local authorities have collected only 40·8 per cent. of what is due, although they calculated that they would manage to collect 57·6 per cent. by now. The shortfall looks as though it may be worse this year than it was last.

Let me make a comment in passing about non-payment. The vast majority of cases of non-payment have arisen because people have had difficulty in finding the money. I do not believe that there is a mass non-payment campaign—although some people are trying to claim credit for one. I can testify to the fact that there is considerable anger among those who have paid against those who can pay but have not paid. I do not accept that the "Can pay, won't pay!" campaign has been popular in Scotland. It has been deeply resented in many quarters, and it has not brought down the poll tax. The poll tax has been brought down by the fact that it is difficult to collect and administratively cumbersome.

The other problem, which I think the Secretary of State addressed, was that the poll tax is, by definition, a flat rate charge. One issue that must be taken on board is the fact that local authorities should have the right of access to funding which has natural buoyancy built into it. That is an important point of principle that needs to be established. The more enthusiastic right-wing members of the Conservative party were attracted to the poll tax simply because it did not have that buoyancy, and they thought that they could screw down the local authorities.

However, that is not compatible with what the Government are increasingly asking the local authorities to do. The Secretary of State acknowledged that the Government have asked the local authorities to take on more and more responsibility to deliver services locally, and to do so under statutes passed by this House. The

[Mr. Bruce]

Environmental Protection Act 1990 is the most recent example. As the Secretary of State again acknowledged, simply keeping pace with inflation in those circumstances leads to excessive increases in poll tax charges. It also puts pressure on the Government, who must at least acknowledge the problem and provide additional grants. Therefore, it is in the Government's interests to allow that a proportion of the income of local authorities—the poll tax accounts for only 20 to 25 per cent.—is buoyant and has a natural relationship to the overall increase in economic activity.

If the Government squeeze grants and control the business rate in such a way that it does not take account of inflation, and if the local authorities must provide additional services, their only source of flexibility, apart from increased efficiency, is the poll tax. Because it accounts for only 20 to 25 per cent. of their income, a 1 per cent. increase in revenue across the board for the council would require an increase of between 4 and 5 per cent. in the poll tax. That means that the poll tax is inevitably inflationary.

Furthermore, it does not have the effect that the Government think, because people have a relationship with their local authority and do not believe that it has simply been extravagant. People recognise the difficulties facing many local authorities. That is another factor that is contributing to the breakdown of the poll tax. Even the Government must recognise that denying any buoyancy to the local authorities is not ultimately in anybody's interest.

The Secretary of State and his predecessors have used extravagant Labour councils as their excuse for justifying their changes, but I can advise them only that the way to deal with the problem is to ensure that local councils are democratically and fairly elected. If proportional representation or some system—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) is laughing. However, if the local authorities were elected in proportion to the votes cast, most of the militant Labour authorities that the hon. Gentleman has used as a stick to justify the poll tax would never have got into power in the first place.

It is interesting that Conservative Members talk about the supremacy of Parliament and refer to what is, frankly, the humbug of the historic association of this Parliament, but fail to recognise that we have the most antiquated, corrupt and decadent political system in the western world. That is what they are presiding over when they fail to recognise the opportunities of a radical change that would make local authorities genuinely accountable, both financially and in terms of the way in which they are elected.

In conclusion, the Secretary of State has shown some recognition that this debate is not just about how we finance local authorities; it is about the proper place of local authorities in our society. I welcome that initiative. The right hon. Gentleman is right: that debate should unite all parties in the House. I have not been afraid to state where we differ from the Tory party or the Labour party. We will enter into a constructive debate on this matter as long as it is genuine and open, and as long as the views of the people in our local communities are taken into account, so that they can be assured that, in the future, they will have local authorities that they can trust, to which they can relate, which they can hold accountable, and which are financially secure.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker appealed for brief speeches.

5.23 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I welcome the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who dealt with both the financing and the organisation of local government. I know that many hon. Members of all parties will want to contribute to that debate.

Let us consider the genesis of the community charge and the reasons why it was introduced. In the beginning, people in certain areas, including London, felt that everybody who was voting should pay at least something towards what they were voting for. There is no morality in voting to spend other people's money. Revolutions were made on the grounds of "no taxation without representation", but we had "representation without taxation." We all remember that—*[Interruption.]* Obviously, Opposition Members are upset at what I am saying, but that principle is still one of the great strengths of the community charge.

I am sure that I shall not take the whole House with me at the beginning of my speech although I may do later, but we must remember the loony left-wing councils in London, of which Brent was a classic example. That council should be given to the Victoria and Albert museum to warn people—now that eastern communism has gone—about what we suffered then. People said that something must be done and that, if the rating system contributed to that state of affairs, it must be changed.

I am one of the first to admit that the community charge has created problems, but everything in this fallen world creates problems. The Labour party never understands that all that we can do is to try to make life tolerable. If we try to make it good, we finish up shooting people. Making life tolerable is a right old triumph in a fallen world.

The first problem with the community charge is that a flat rate tax becomes intolerable if it is set too high. One can argue about the level, but at some stage it will become too high. At levels of between £400 and £500—it is £470 in Brent—the community charge is already beyond that level.

The second problem is that of the low-rated properties in the north. I trust that my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Lee) and for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) will catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they know about those problems. There may be four small houses to every big house in those areas. The penalty of the community charge on those small houses was never even imagined by the Department of the Environment. Those two things have worked against any popularity that the community charge might have enjoyed.

However, one must pay tribute to the fact that the Government have put in a lot of money, both for transitional relief and for other purposes. Billions of pounds have been put in over the past two years to try to ease the burdens of many people.

The question is whether we should look at the community charge to see what we can do with it to make

it more tolerable to society, given its advantages which I still defend, or whether we go for something else entirely. I have always believed that if one can amend something to make it work, that is better than digging up the plant and starting over again.

The principle of the community charge is good. I do not believe that anybody with any income at all should vote without paying something towards the services for which they are voting. To do so is political immorality.—*[Interruption.]* I say that again, and I am surprised that Opposition Members disagree with me. I trusted that I could have taken them with me on that. I repeat that it is political immorality.

If we changed the system, we would have a new set of losers. Whenever a system is changed, those who gain say, "Thank you very much," and go away and forget all about it, but those who lose remember it to the ballot box. If we change the system again, another set of losers will be queuing up to ask what can be done.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) referred to the fact that the property rating was highly unpopular—so it was not as though we were moving from the garden of Eden, having eaten the wicked apple, and are now seeking to return to the garden of Eden again. Wherever I went in the country—whether to a Conservative party meeting or a public meeting—somebody would stand up and ask, "When are you going to get rid of the rating system?" My right hon. and hon. Friends will have had similar experiences.

We must cut the level of the community charge and anaesthetise some of the pain. Then we can see where we are——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the fact that the community charge in Brent is 40 per cent. higher than in Barnet underlines the relative efficiency of those two councils, and that we need to improve the efficiency of local councils rather than tinkering with the community charge?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I am sure that the burghers of Barnet will welcome that intervention, and that it will increase my hon. Friend's majority by at least 10,000 at the next general election. I shall point out to the burghers of Brent that if they elected a council which was wholly Conservative—as is the case with their Member of Parliament in Brent, North—the glorious image of Barnet would be seen in Brent.

We must reduce the community charge, and to do so we must take education out of local government expenditure. I want education to be taken out of local government control regardless, because the grant-maintained school system is one of the most successful ways of improving education standards in this country. I trust parents before bureaucrats, which the Labour party never does. We should give responsibility to parents, not inspectors from the Department of Education and Science who led us down and are now being paid to help solve the problems. Parents should be in charge of schools, and I will back their vote.

I recently visited Claremont school in my constituency, which has become grant-maintained and been totally transformed. There are now queues of parents waiting to send their children there. Unless the Labour party catches up with us on the issue of grant-maintained schools, it could lose the next election even more heavily than the previous one. I am a friendly man, and I say that to be helpful to Labour Members.

Some 42 per cent. of local government expenditure goes on education—38·6 per cent. in Brent and 42·3 per cent. in the whole of the country. Education costs local government £17 billion. We should not take the entire £17 billion away, but £12 billion—exactly the amount of the business rate—which makes the equation neat. That will leave local authorities £5 billion more to spend elsewhere. I shall say later where that sum comes from—it does not come out of undiscovered space. That extra £5 billion would mean that throughout the country the community charge could be reduced, on average, from about £400 to about £250. The pressure would be considerably lessened by a 40 per cent. decrease in the community charge.

Where can that extra money come from? The winter is with us and I noticed squirrels digging up their first nuts in my garden this morning. The Treasury always has nuts in case something happens. Now that the squirrels are gathering theirs, the Treasury must pick up its nuts. A second alternative would be to borrow the money. We have the lowest borrowing against national income of practically any country in the world.

The third, long-term option would be to have a series of different taxes. Almost no other country in the world relies on one tax system for local government. On the continent, countries have four or five streams, including hotel and sales taxes——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): What about a property tax?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: There could be a small property tax. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is taking my thinking further—the debate between the two sides of the Chamber has begun.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North West): If we were to move education to the central Exchequer, due to the fact that it makes such a major contribution to the community charge, which feeds into the retail price index, we would reduce the RPI by 2 per cent., thus reducing the cost of benefits to the Treasury. Therefore, in addition to privatisation and the other means of raising resources mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), it seems that, instead of cutting taxes, we shall be able to cut the community charge.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I did not realise that I was Merlin the magician and could achieve so much. Taking education out of local government spending would, to an extent, solve the community charge problems and would also improve education the length and breadth of the country, so we would get two advantages for the price of one.

Three other steps should be taken to anaesthetise the pain. A wife at home should never have to pay on her husband's wage, and a husband should not have to pay according to his wife's wage. A wife is the only person who has to pay 100 per cent. when she has no income, which is wrong and totally anti-family.

Secondly, if a pensioner is put into a community home at local authority expense, no community charge is paid. If a pensioner is kept at home by the family, where he should be, community charge has to be paid. That policy should end—the easiest option would be to abolish the

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

community charge for all pensioners, because if we discriminate, we shall find pensioners moving backwards and forwards like yo-yos.

Thirdly, in large families with more than four or six members, the community charge for the fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh member should be reduced to 50 per cent., 25 per cent., and so on. At present, the community charge in London forces young people out of their families and increases accommodation problems.—[HON. MEMBERS: "We told the Government that."] But Opposition Members have not accepted the first principle, which I still stand by, that nobody should vote until they pay something towards it. Otherwise, we have political immorality.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: No, I shall not give way any more.

One point which follows from the speech of the hon. Member for Gordon is that there is great indignation in my constituency about Brent not collecting all the community charge. If people in my constituency who have paid have to pay a heavier burden next year because others did not pay this year, there will be uproar. All the community charges due must be collected properly.

Mr. Lewis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I shall not give way any more. I said that I would not do so, and I like to be a man of my word; otherwise, people will be disappointed.

Mr. Lewis: I was only trying to help.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: As one Lancastrian to another, I welcome that phrase.

At present, there is no discount for people who pay the community charge early—certainly not in Harrow. Therefore, why should people bother to pay early when they can put the money in the bank at the present interest rate. A good discount system would encourage people to pay early. At present, people are sent 10 pieces of paper and can pay over 10 months—I do not understand that system because it does not encourage people to pay.

How many people have avoided payment and how many other people are having to cover for them?

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): What about identity cards?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that if we had identity cards, we could find out who had paid. The only way to achieve full payment is through national identity cards—I am glad that I have the hon. Gentleman's approval.

I welcome what the Secretary of State said about looking at local government functions and their relation, nationally and locally. Unless we entirely separate national finances from local finances, the battle will go on—and I hope that we achieve that in the next two years. The finances are separated in Germany and Scandinavia. All local government expenditure should be raised locally, and national Government expenditure should be raised nationally; otherwise, the resulting continual tension does no good to national or local government.

In many districts of London, the 1974 local government reorganisation is still highly unpopular. If we got rid of education from the local government remit, we could have smaller boroughs in which people knew their councillors and had a sense of identity, as with bringing back Wembley. Nothing would be more popular in my district than bringing back the previous boroughs that were destroyed and put into massive conglomerations with tower blocks.

Mr. Lewis: The Conservative party did that.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: We did it, but unlike the Labour party, we say when we have got it wrong. We do not continue over the cliff edge to total destruction. I must not be agitated by Opposition Members, and I draw my sentence and speech to an end.

5.37 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I do not agree entirely with the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), who would be surprised if I did. The remarkable factor in this debate is the number of different views about how local government should be financed.

I have not yet decided whether the Secretary of State was setting up a smokescreen or looking for someone to pull chestnuts out of the fire because the Government now concede that they made a monumental cock-up three years ago when they introduced the poll tax. Nothing that can be said will get away from that. To their credit, some Conservative Members acknowledged that the system was fundamentally flawed from the beginning.

Whatever we do with the poll tax, however we tinker about with it at the edges, whatever is put in or taken out of it, it will still remain flawed. It cannot be anything but a flat rate tax—fundamentally wrong and absolutely hated. Even if poll tax payments are reduced, the tax will still be wrong because of the great inequalities throughout the country. That is why the people have rebelled against it—because of the sheer hypocrisy and disparity involved in it.

People were told that they would pay for what they got. Then they found out that they did not receive the services anyway. They asked why they should pay for schools when they had no children. These questions were first asked in this House. Payment for local government is and always has been a collective charge within a community for services that people in that community vote for.

The Secretary of State says that he is looking for a new structure. I have spent 20 years in local government trying to find one. The West Riding county council, one of the best education bodies ever known, has gone; so has South Yorkshire county council, and so have the urban district councils. Since then, we have witnessed the rise of the parishes, but what has the poll tax done for them? It has taken money away from them. The rating system used to bring in money for parish works but that has now disappeared because this is a national tax. The Conservative party, supposedly the protector of parish and town councils, has helped to destroy them.

People do not see why they should pay extra taxation when others do not, so they think that we should get rid of parish councils. Co-operation and responsibility should be mutual. Local government has not received much

co-operation in the past nine years; it has experienced imposition by central Government, which is why local government has reacted as it has.

A new scheme must take all these elements into account, but above all we must accept that the poll tax is wrong, both for local government and for the people it represents. I think that the Secretary of State has admitted as much; why else would he have said that we should look together for a different system? If he were convinced that the system was right or that it could somehow be altered, he would not have said what he did. He has realised that it is seriously flawed and must be got rid of.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The Secretary of State did not tell us what was wrong with the poll tax. All he said was that it was very unpopular, and he gave its unpopularity as the reason for reviewing it. He should have analysed why it was unpopular. Instead, he offered no ideas or agenda for discussion.

Mr. McKay: That explains my remark about a smokescreen. Nothing positive seems to have been offered, except for a consensus approach.

This House got rid of the rating system, which was in some cases unpopular and which included some anomalies. It is true that some people did not like it, but the poll tax has at least made people like the rating system because they could understand it and it was fairer.

The rating system was a good way of paying for local finance. By and large, the house a person dwelt in showed that persons's wealth. Of course there were exceptions. We all know about the little old lady who paid huge rates for her house while five people next door paid the same or less. Of course, nine times out of ten those little old ladies brought up families who later made a larger contribution to central Government taxation.

The problems with local government date not from the advent of the poll tax but from 1972, 1973 and 1974, when local government was reorganised. That was when the trouble started.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): If, as the hon. Gentleman says, he and his party like the rating system so much, why did they fail again and again when in office to carry out a revaluation of property?

Mr. McKay: I did say that local government has been in continual flux and has never had the time to settle down while we have been scratching away at it. But since 1979, the Tory Government have compounded its problems by continually reducing central Government's contribution to local government—from 79 per cent. to 33 per cent. Local government reacted in the only way it could and put up the rates.

When central Government realised what was happening, they started talking about rate capping. They then rate-capped authorities, thereby removing flexibility from the system and making it much worse.

Mr. Couchman: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that returning to the rating system would just be a large electoral bribe to the 18 million people who made no contribution to local government expenditure before? Would it not be an attempt to entice them to vote in the hope that they could make no contribution to local government in future?

Mr. McKay: When did we have problems with local government before the Conservatives started messing about with the system? I admit that the trouble started in 1974, following which the Labour Government put into practice what the Conservatives had begun. They should not have done that.

I believe that people who can pay should pay something towards local government, based on their ability to pay. We could have made the rating system work on that pattern. That is why I was interested to hear the Secretary of State talk about working together, but first we must all determine that the poll tax must go.

There is nothing wrong with a Secretary of State admitting that the Government have been wrong for three years and deciding to get rid of the poll tax, following which we could search for a new system of local government finance together. I was, however, disappointed to hear the Secretary of State say that the process will take two years. In all my 20 years in local government, I never found different systems that worked. They were either too easy to evade, they cost too much to collect, or they were unfair and unwieldy. The poll tax exhibits all those faults. It places an unbelievable administrative burden on local authorities.

During October my local authority, which is a small one, received 5,115 phone calls of inquiry and 3,040 letters of inquiry, and sent out 8,784 reminders. In the same period, it dealt with 4,326 summonses, and 20,322 people have yet to make a payment. The housing benefit of 8,108 people has had to be altered and the poll tax has changed 6,198 times in one month. All that demands a great many members of staff, which is why it costs my local authority £3·5 million a year more to collect the poll tax than it did to collect the rates.

Why should it be said to cost about £800 a year to educate a child in my area, while other authorities receive £1,200 for the same purpose? Why should it cost less in my local authority area to educate children? That is leading to a deterioration of education standards in our area. All those matters must be examined.

Why should a wife who does not work pay poll tax or why should her husband have to pay it for her? What are they getting out of it? I am sure that my constituents would welcome genuine dialogue on local government finance. We must make up our minds that the poll tax has to go. Conservative Members will never have a better chance to show whether they are for or against the poll tax. I invite them to vote with the Opposition, thereby forcing the Secretary of State to alter the poll tax.

5.50 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on his maiden speech. He was elected in difficult circumstances following the sad and sudden death of Mike Carr who, as some of my hon. Friends have said, we hardly got to know. The new Member for Bootle is a member of the Labour party and on this subject, above all, he had to be slightly controversial or his speech would not have been believed by his hon. Friends or by many others. I also congratulate my two right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Scotland who have just taken up their appointments. My right hon.

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Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is on the Front Bench, so I assume that he will deliver the winding-up speech.

Despite the speech by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) there is no doubt that the old rating system was deeply unpopular and had to go. It was put in place 200 or 300 years ago and it is ridiculous for anyone to suggest that it should be brought back. In case some Opposition Members think that there is a chance of convincing the British people that the rating system should be brought back, I will give the House a couple of quotes. Lord McIntosh of Haringey was deposed by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) who assumed the leadership of the GLC when Labour won control there. Lord McIntosh, a leading Labour member in the other place, said that rates were,

"desperately inadequate as a fair basis for raising revenue for local government."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 May 1988; Vol. 497, c. 652.]

Mr. John Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tracey: No, because I am short of time and many hon. Members want to participate in the debate.

A Labour party official policy statement was contained in a document entitled "Local Services, Local Choices, Local Taxes". That document stated:

"A system where rateable values are based on a notional annual rate is mystifying to most people. To make matters worse, the values are out of date, giving rise to all sorts of anomalies."

Mr. John Evans: Perhaps the rating system was unpopular, but can the hon. Gentleman quote any instances in Great Britain where rate collectors were physically assaulted by the public? There have been many instances of poll tax collectors being physically assaulted.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman should look to the people who stir up feelings which bring about such law breaking. No hon. Member can condone such behaviour, and neither rate collectors nor community charge collectors should be attacked by anybody. I totally condemn those Opposition Members who refuse to pay the community charge. I wish that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen would also condemn them because the lack of such condemnation gives credibility to law breakers.

An even weightier argument against the rates was advanced by the Opposition. In 1980, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), who at that time was not the leader of his party, said:

"the most unjust of all taxes, local rates, take most from those who can afford least".

That is a sample of a procession of Opposition Members or senior Members of the Labour party in local government who attacked the old rating system and all that it entailed. That view has been shared for years by many people, especially by old ladies who live on their own next door to a house with three or four adults, three of whom paid nothing. Such unfairness bred discontent and for many years the Conservative party said that the rating system must be abolished.

The principle eloquently advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) is that those entitled to vote should pay a share of local government costs. That is the whole basis of the community charge and the thinking of the Conservative party. Whatever changes emerge from the review by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, I hope that we shall not move from the cardinal principle that every adult who has the vote should pay a share of local government costs. That principle is agreed by everybody.

In attempting to denigrate that principle, the Labour party has on 65 occasions in the three and a half years since the 1987 general election changed its policy on the system of local government finance. I have the documents which prove that. Every one of the 65 changes has been documented, and the documents show 20 splits between Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen on local government finance. The Opposition know perfectly well that it will not be easy to change the system that we have put in place.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tracey: No, because it is almost 6 o'clock, from which time hon. Members will be restricted to 10-minute speeches. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I assume that he will have a chance to speak in the debate.

The Opposition know that it will not be easy to put in place the changes that they glibly talk about. In its 65 different changes of policy over the past three and a half years, the Labour party has failed to address the central problem of drawing up an alternative. The Opposition have not agreed who should pay the tax or on what it should be based. They tried the roof tax which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) proposed because he felt that something was needed before the Labour party confronted the electorate in the local government elections. The roof tax was replaced with a floor tax, which would have entailed taxing properties according to the floor area. That was proposed by a not inconsiderable authority, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), a former environment and housing spokesman for the Labour party.

More recently, the Opposition came round to the suggestions from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) for a tax base which included the valuation that insurance companies place on houses for rebuilding purposes. He first brought that up in March in a television interview with Mr. David Frost in a desperate attempt to put something before the electorate in advance of the local elections in London in May.

Then some intellectual rigour was brought to the matter by the Leader of the Opposition. When interviewed by *The Independent* in April, he explained that the Labour party would consider several different tax bases and produce some figures

"to bung into the computer."

That is an example of deep thinking from the Labour party.

In that morass of thoughts and possibilities, the Opposition must decide who should pay their replacement tax. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who for some time spoke for the Opposition on environment matters, said that there was no question of making people pay who are not paying income tax. He made that statement in March on the "Eye Witness" programme on ITV. However, when the hon. Member for Dagenham was asked a similar question three days later in the "Today" programme on the BBC, he said:

"Well, that's the one issue which we have yet to decide . . . we will reach a decision very shortly."

The Labour party cannot decide when it will be possible to introduce the changes. The hon. Member for Dagenham said that it would be at least two years after the Labour party had achieved the—unlikely—prospect of becoming the Government of this country, before they could make the changes. I noticed that, although the hon. Member for Dagenham said that, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that it might well take a full two years before any workable changes could be introduced, the hon. Gentleman did not rise to intervene although there were the usual catcalls from the Opposition Benches.

Once again, there is confusion in the Labour ranks. After the hon. Member for Dagenham spoke about the two-year period, the hon. Member for Copeland said:

"there's no question about our commitment to abolish the poll tax as soon as we have a Labour Government."

This whole matter is not so clear as the Opposition would like, in their motion, the British public to think. The Opposition have changed their minds 65 times in the past three and a half years. They still have no definite policy to put before the British public. There have been at least 20 splits on the Opposition Front Bench on the issue. I have the evidence of that and I will gladly provide chapter and verse for each of those splits.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State invited the Opposition to engage in sensible discussions to reach a consensus on this matter. Let us see whether the Opposition can put their words into action.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that speeches should not exceed 10 minutes between now and 8 o'clock.

6.5 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): In previous debates, I have compared the former Prime Minister's description of the poll tax as the "flagship" of her third term to the Titanic. Her Titanic met its iceberg in the form of the 28 million people who are worse off under that tax, almost half of whom have refused to pay it. The captain has already gone overboard and the officers are now reshuffling the deckchairs a bit. That will not do them much good.

Resistance to the poll tax has possibly been the largest campaign of civil disobedience this century. It has involved thousands of meetings, marches and rallies, and it shows no sign of abating. In fact, we are only weeks away from a new season, and that may have given urgency to the Secretary of State's review. While there were deathbed conversions among the leadership contenders last week who recognised that the Conservative party was in terminal crisis unless they did something about the poll tax, the poll tax became the catalyst, the crystal within the saturated solution, because it represented, on top of everything else, the last straw. On top of the sell-offs of gas, water and the electric and on top of mortgage and inflation increases, the poll tax was the last straw for the working people in this country.

On 14 August, the Council of Mortgage Lenders produced figures for the repossession of homes comparing the first six months of this year with the last six months of last year. They showed that the number of people between six months and 12 months behind on their mortgage payments had increased by 32 per cent. and that the number of people more than 12 months behind had increased by 56 per cent. In addition to that debt, millions of people go further into debt by trying to pay the poll tax. In the words of another Government campaign, many of them "just say no".

Millions of families face not just debt, but winter bills. For three years now, I have said on behalf of, and alongside, my constituents that I would stick it out and not pay the poll tax so long as they did the same. In Coventry, three quarters of adults in two adult households are worse off. A quarter of all households—60,000 people—are more than £450 worse off net a year. That is equivalent to £600 if we take tax and national insurance into account. All that, so that 3 per cent. of the city's population—just 6,000 adults—can be £450 better off.

I get called a freeloader. The real freeloaders under the poll tax are the Cabinet, including the new Secretary of State for the Environment, who are saving thousands of pounds under the poll tax. The real freeloaders are the top 5 per cent. of the population who have saved so much money through the poll tax at the expense of millions of ordinary families at the bottom of society.

The hatred for the poll tax has spread into areas where I never thought I would see it. I never thought that, a month ago, I would see a finalist in the national tennis finals put a bit of cardboard before his towel with "No to the poll tax" written on it. Is it not a crime that Andrew Castle was fined £2,400 for that, while Aggasi was fined only half that for spitting at an umpire in the United States. That is an indication of how far through society the hatred of the poll tax extends.

The Cabinet realised the extent of that hatred. They realised that the inability to collect or enforce the poll tax meant that they had to change it. The Government have had to face all those problems with the poll tax when fewer than one quarter of the councils in England and Wales have yet to go to court to enforce the tax.

If Lambeth is to enforce the poll tax, it must get it from 73 Mickey Mouses, nine Donald Ducks and eight Adolf Hitlers. A vicar in Lambeth has received four bills—one for himself, one for God the Father, one for God the Son and one for God the Holy Ghost. That may be funny, but the Audit Commission has stated that, in the shire counties, between 1 December last year and 31 August this year—nine months—on average 24 per cent. of the register changed; 30 per cent. changed in the metropolitan areas; 35 per cent. changed in the outer London boroughs and 40 per cent. changed in the inner London boroughs. There have been millions of changes, and that is one reason why the poll tax is unenforceable.

Only a quarter of the councils have gone to court, but we have seen a huge denial of rights. A harder line is being taken by the courts, just like that which was adopted during the miners' strike. It has been a right of the people since 1831 that those who cannot afford to buy a lawyer can take a friend to court. That was re-established in the Court of Appeal in 1971 in MacKenzie *v.* MacKenzie. Throughout the country, however, from Coventry, Leicester and Gateshead down to Bournemouth, magistrates are denying working-class people the right to have a friend in court. They are acting on instructions from the Home Office.

We are told that the poll tax is an individual tax. Why is it that, in Warrington, batches of eight non-payers of the

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poll tax are dealt with by the magistrates collectively? Why is it that, at Lymington in Hampshire, they are dealt with 10 at a time? If an individual refuses to be dealt with as one in a batch, he will be found liable and could be held for contempt of court.

Conservative Members allege that I am a generalised law breaker, but during my 38 years I have appeared in court on only two occasions, once at Battersea and once at Coventry. Both appearances related to the poll tax. We are told that nothing can go wrong with the system. We are assured that everything is checked and double-checked before summonses are issued or reminders to pay are sent out. Why is it that in Coventry a 17-month-old baby was summonsed? That happened to a 21-month-old baby in Battersea. In Coventry, summonses were sent to several people who were deceased. *[Laughter.]*

If that seems funny to Conservative Members, I ask them to put themselves in the position of a recently bereaved family who read in the newspaper that the deceased had been summonsed. That happened only four months ago.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nellist: I shall not give way now.

Teenagers have been summonsed. Once someone has been through the courts, the bailiffs—mediaeval thugs—are called in. They represent a system which the National Consumer Council, and even the Tory-appointed Law Commission of four years ago, reckon should be abolished. The first family in Coventry to be threatened by the police coming to arrest it, a court appearance and imprisonment was Asian. That happened eight or nine days ago. The husband was in receipt of invalidity benefit and the wife was a diabetic. The two sons were low-paid. Councils throughout the country have been pushed into taking that sort of action by the laws that the Government have introduced.

In effect, the Tories say, "Don't worry; it will settle down." To use a cricket term, which it is fashionable to adopt these days, we are told that the poll tax will "play itself in". But as Nye Bevan said:

"Why look in the crystal ball when you can read the book?

In Scotland, the poll tax has been operated for 21 months. What has happened? At the end of October 1989, the uncollected poll tax amounted to £142 million, or 14·7 per cent. of that due to be collected.

Are things settling down in Scotland? At the end of October this year, £623 million was uncollected, or 59·2 per cent. of that due to be collected. At the end of the financial year, which was in March, 850,000 Scottish people had paid nothing or were three months in arrears. It appears that 1,208,000 summary warrants have been issued this year by the sheriffs—33 per cent. of the population of Scotland have been summonsed—compared with the 1 per cent. who were summonsed for non-payment of rates before the introduction of the poll tax. That may not have concerned Conservative members, because they have only 10 parliamentary seats in Scotland to defend. They began to wake up, however, when summonses began to be issued in England and Wales, especially in the Tory-controlled area of Windsor and Maidenhead, for example, in what is supposed to be the soft south.

Last Monday, the Government finally gave me the figures for England and Wales. I had spent weeks trying to get them from the Department of the Environment. Incidentally, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office, which each employ about 20 statisticians to deal with local authority finance, do not collect these statistics. In England alone, 4·5 million people have not paid their poll tax. In addition, it appears that 45 boroughs are not included in this list.

In the past 11 years, 4,329 people were imprisoned for not paying their rates. That was 400 a year. There was one imprisonment each year for every local authority in the country. The local authority in my constituency has issued 26,000 liability orders so far. Where the hell will the Government find prison accommodation for these people? It would have been impossible to do so even before Strangeways got done. The Government will never be able to find the necessary prison accommodation. That is why the Secretary of State for the Environment is running scared and talking about abolition.

What is happening to services and jobs? No one has mentioned this so far. In Wandsworth, thousands of people will be marching through the streets tonight. The marchers will be workers, parents and others who are concerned about services. Why are they marching? The answer is that poll tax attacks jobs and services. What is Sir Paul Beresford's borough doing? It is closing three of its nine secondary schools and 11 of its 18 social service day nurseries. Twelve of the borough's primary schools are being closed, along with all five of its junior clubs. Half of the half-term play centres are being closed. All the lunch and holiday play centres are being closed. It is privatising 10 old people's homes. School meals provision, cleaning services and ground maintenance are also being privatised. All services are subject to attack. Jobs and services will be lost as a result of the poll tax.

The Secretary of State's review may find one or two ways in which to ameliorate the effect of the poll tax, but that is all. I welcome the commitment of my party to repeal the poll tax legislation as soon as it forms the next Government. If the Labour party and the trade unions would use their undoubted strength to support the 14 million who have not paid their poll tax, we could get rid of the poll tax well short of the two years that will elapse while the Secretary of State's review takes place, and shorten the Government's life. That is what we shall do.

6.15 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I have seldom heard a more disgusting speech than that delivered by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), who claims to be a democrat. In the coldest terms that I can use, he is a man who was elected to this place to obey the laws that we pass. It seems that he is trying to uphold civil disobedience. Anyone who condones those who break the law deserves the greatest condemnation.

I have seldom heard a speech that so changed the climate of opinion as that which was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. It was one of the more brilliant speeches that I have heard during the 31 years that I have been a Member of this place. There is no doubt that it will lead to an attempt to

bring about unity of thought within the country as we come to consider how we can deal with the problem of local government finance and, if necessary, the structure of local government—it is difficult to separate one from the other—in a way that will prove satisfactory to the House generally for the next 20, 30 or more years.

I do not intend to attack the Labour party as some of my hon. Friends have done so brilliantly. If we wish to establish a climate in which we can begin to enjoy some co-operation, let us stop attacking one another. We shall do somewhat better if we co-operate instead of attacking. If we are genuine in our desire to see something that is good and lasting for all the people, let us see what we can do together.

One of the difficulties is that the Labour party thought that suddenly it had the Government over a barrel with the poll tax. Instead, it is we who have the Labour party over a barrel. One of the features of the community charge that has, I think, been accepted by everyone is that it is right and proper that everyone in the community should make some contribution to the services that he or she is receiving. The Government published as the likely level of community charge for east Devon the figure of £245 plus the parish precept. In fact, Devon county council had to introduce a community charge of £345.

Mr. Dewar: It must be a Labour council.

Sir Peter Emery: It is a Conservative council. A couple had to pay £690, and if they had an elderly relative with them, for example, the charge was £1,035. In my constituency, 35 per cent. of the electorate are retired. My constituents were faced with a charge that they neither accepted nor could afford. Many retired people moved to areas in which there was low-rated property. They expected to be able to live comfortably in those areas. They found themselves suddenly having to pay a community charge which they never expected and could ill afford. There was unfairness.

One difficulty is that the accountability factor is not working because there is a three-year period between local government elections. It is no good suggesting that an authority can be accountable for what it spends in one year if it is not subject to re-election for another three years. We have to deal with that problem.

Another unfairness that has come to light is the position of those living in rural areas where there are next to no services. Previously their properties would have had a low rating. Now they are having to pay the same community charge as people living in towns, where a considerable number of services are provided.

I am immensely pleased that the Government are willing to undertake an overall review of the approach to the financing of local government. Anyone with a reasonable approach must know that to make any massive changes will require a period of consultation and then a parliamentary year to deal with the necessary legislation —*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should not crow. If they were ever to be in government, which they will not be, they would also need a year to deal with the legislation necessary to replace the poll tax with their preferred system. The time scale is common to both parties.

A number of people find it difficult to pay the poll tax, and they will find it even more difficult next year, even though the estimated increase will be only about £40 or £50. The Government should consider providing some relief for those people.

Let us compare the provision of such relief with the repayment of national debt. The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, announced that £3 billion had been set aside for repayment of the national debt this year. Britain has made two such repayments during the past two years, totalling £14 billion. I welcome that, and it is a major step in the right direction. However, if I had to choose whether, for the 12 months hence, to use that £3 billion for national debt repayment or to prevent an increase in local government expenditure but to reduce the burden of the charge on the lower paid and others unable to pay it, I should choose the latter. That would be the sort of caring attitude that I believe our new Prime Minister wishes to embody in the structure of his Government.

There should be some provision for relief for the ordinary community charge payer while the review and any necessary legislation are undertaken. I hope that any new system will have the agreement of all parties. The Liberal Democrats appear willing—although they have now left the Chamber—*[Interruption.]* I fight the Liberal Democrats in my constituency, where the Labour party would lose its deposit. A spirit should be engendered to enable us to introduce a structure that will last for a long time. That is what most hon. Members want, and I am sure that it is what the country wants.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The problem facing the Government was clearly summed up by Rita Hale—who is known to many hon. Members as head of local government matters at the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—in a statement in *The Daily Telegraph* on 30 November. She was asked what the Government could do about the poll tax, and she said:

> "I think that the answer comes down to whether the community charge is saveable. I suspect that it is not . . . To carry on with the community charge you have to put so much money into the system that it becomes questionable whether it is worth doing so to get the yield."

That is a clear statement of the obvious.

The more the Government try to reduce the impact of the charge by extending rebates, through transitional relief, and so on, the more expensive it becomes and the bigger the bureaucracy that is built. We all know that it is an expensive bureaucracy—which, in many local authorities, is already creaking under the strain. Every time help is given to one group to make life a little easier for them, there is another group next in line who become extremely aggrieved that they have been left out. The more the Government go down that road, the deeper they will be sucked into a morass from which they will never dig themselves out.

Those who argue that banding the poll tax is a solution really do not have the answer to the problem. There are many practical difficulties in trying to band poll tax into broad bands of income. It would involve local authorities knowing a great deal about the tax affairs of their poll tax payers. More seriously, the whole concept of broad bands involves the application of a poverty trap. When people cross over the threshold into the first band of poll tax liability, they will be worse off despite an increase in

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income. There are already far too many examples of that in the social security system. It is not a sensible solution to the problems of the poll tax.

Some Conservative Members have suggested that there should be a switch of responsibility for some services from local taxation to national taxation. They think that that would be a painless solution to the problem. National taxation might be fairer than the poll tax, but the services still have to be paid for. Those of us who cut our teeth in local government would be apprehensive about further examples of local authorities administering services over which they had no financial control. That would be an unpleasant and unaccountable position for local authorities.

I have heard some people arguing that it would be quite simple to transfer responsibility for education from local to central Government, and that all schools could be administered by the Department of Education and Science. That would mean an extraordinary level of central Government interference and a centralisation of services which many of us would not regard as acceptable. Again, it would involve an expensive central Government bureaucracy.

The most important reason why the Government simply cannot continue with the poll tax is the public's reaction to it. However carefully and expensively the Government try to dress it up in fancy new clothes, the basic injustices of the system show through. The country has made it clear that such an unfair and unjust system is not acceptable. Even some of those who have gained by the introduction of the poll tax say that it is unacceptable, so it is obvious that the system cannot continue for any length of time.

What are the alternatives? There is a limited range of options, none of which is overwhelmingly appealing. Tory Members yearning for a painless way of paying for local services are in for a sad shock. The search for some generally acceptable way to pay for local services is rather like the search for the philosopher's stone—it is doomed to failure. I was one of the original members of the Layfield committee charged by the late Tony Crosland with trying to find a solution to the problem of replacing the rating system. That experience convinced me that there is no easily acceptable solution. Every system we can think of has some flaws. Every scheme we put forward will upset somebody. In effect, we are looking for the least worst solution.

That boils down to a choice between a rating system and a local income tax. The only way in which the rating system can appear in any way attractive is by comparison with the extraordinary and unpleasant experience of the poll tax. We cannot go back to the rating system. It does not share out burdens fairly and it results in a substantial number of people with incomes not contributing to a local taxation base. To make local rates income related, the local council needs to know a lot about the financial position of its citizens and a complex system of rebates has to be built which, again, is expensive and difficult to administer.

No one who has ever tried to explain the concept of notional rental value as the basis for rateable values would want to return to that. I accept that capital values are much easier to understand and to explain, but they are also far more volatile and problems of revaluation will result. Capital values can go up but, as we have seen in recent years, they can also go down.

Last week, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) argued for some system under which a property is revalued on a capital basis only when someone moves. That would create the marvellous situation where two people lived side by side in identical properties, one paying a different set of rates from the other because one had moved recently and the other had not. That illustrates yet again how fraught with problems a return to the rating system would be.

A local income tax system is the only sensible and fair way of paying for local services, and the Layfield committee identified it as the only serious candidate for a new source of local revenue which would improve local government accountability. It is worth mentioning in passing that the Layfield committee examined every possible sort of local government finance that one could think of, but it did not spend 30 seconds looking at the poll tax because something so nonsensical was never on the agenda.

There are problems with a local income tax. There are difficulties with its administration. It is much easier with large local authorities than small ones. That is why I was glad that the Secretary of State held out the prospect that the review would not look simply at local government finance but at local government structure as well. We have suffered under the piecemeal reorganisations since the war because we have looked at finance in isolation from structure and at structure in isolation from finance, when the two should go hand in hand.

I recognise that some people will be concerned about the risks of a local income tax giving local authorities the ability to levy excessive levels of taxation or to undermine the position of central Government in terms of economic management through the taxation system. That could be safeguarded by a system of fair voting in local government. Proportional representation in local government would provide a substantial safeguard. If we cannot have that, let us at the very least have a system in which some councillors retire every year with annual elections rather than the four-yearly all-out elections which London suffers.

I endorse what the Secretary of State said about the kernel of the problem being the relationship between local and central Government. Layfield also asked that question. First, said the Layfield committee, we must make up our minds about what sort of local government we want—whether we want it to be the agent and creature of central Government or to be an independent organisation reflecting local views. I come down firmly in favour of the principle of local self-government. I therefore come out strongly in favour of local income tax as the best way of breathing new life into the local government system.

6.32 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on joining us in the House. Having been a social worker in his part of the world, I know the problems he faces, and I know, too, the great efforts that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made to help to solve them. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State on his welcome return to the Dispatch Box and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on his translation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment knows well that the majority of people, including my constituents, consider it fair that everyone should make some contribution to the services that they demand and use. But for those who have the misfortune to live under the heel of the profligate Labour-controlled Lancashire county council the burden is simply too onerous.

My right hon. Friend has promised that he will at last look at the structure of local government at the same time as its financing, as the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) said. There is no doubt that the burden would certainly be considerably lightened if the major towns and cities, such as Blackburn, Lancaster, Preston and Burnley, were to be removed from the county and became all-purpose authorities like the old county boroughs, each carrying the can for its own spending decisions and not for those of the county.

The burden would be lightened still further if more schools were to cast off the wasteful bureaucracy of the Lancashire education authority and go for direct funding, as two of my schools have wisely done to the great benefit of pupils and staff alike. But, even with such measures, some unfairnesses would remain, and high on the list of those would be the position of mobile home dwellers, on whose behalf I have frequently written to my right hon. Friend's predecessor.

I have a large number of mobile homes in my area—614 to be precise. Many of them are occupied by retired couples who have lived prudently all their lives and saved for independence in their retirement. Many have sold their previous homes and moved to low-rated mobile homes to keep down their expenses only to be faced with an excessive county charge and a district charge on top.

Those people do not think that they should be charged the full community charge because they do not require or receive full services. As one of my constituents put it, "We pay for the roads, the lighting, the cleaning and general maintenance of our site, covering quite a large area, in our site rent, as well as in the community charge." That does not seem fair to them and it does not seem fair to me. Even if something is done to reduce the county council's extortionate demands, something should be done to help mobile home owners in any new system that we may devise.

As my right hon. Friend knows, we regard the all ages social index as being weighted unfairly against Lancaster and in favour of higher-spending, less-prudent local authorities, such as Blackburn, which spends 55 per cent. per head more than Lancaster and yet has a £20 lower community charge because of the weighting of that index. We hope that that will be remedied in any new proposal that may be introduced.

I hope, too, that proper allowance will be made for the older low-rated property referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), of which we have more than 10,000. Transitional relief helps little, because Lancaster spends wildly above the Government's target and the charge payers pay the penalty for the county's profligacy. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give those people more reliefs now, whatever the new system may eventually be.

6.37 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): It will be apparent to the country tonight that the Tory party is in the biggest mess of its own creation that anyone has ever seen. Scotland has had the poll tax for a considerable time and many people are in deep trouble because of the unthinking, uncaring way in which it has been implemented by the Government in Scotland.

I welcome the Secretary of State for the Environment, who has come out from the wilderness, but it looks as if he has returned to the Tory jungle. In the speeches of Tory Members tonight, there is no evidence of any compassion or warmth. If the Secretary of State wishes genuinely to review the poll tax, it is clear that he will be in among the animals of the Tory party, and I do not think that he will come out unscathed.

I understand that the Secretary of State is paying his staff's poll tax. Perhaps he was frightened that some would not pay it and would end up in court. Instead of abolishing the poll tax, the Secretary of State may say, "It is unfair and unjust, which is why I pay the poll tax for my staff. I wish that every other employer in the country would do the same, and then the Government could look after the desperate people who cannot afford to pay."

The Secretary of State is supposedly against the poll tax, yet he voted for its introduction in Scotland. I hope that he will listen to the people of Scotland, who have said for years that it should be chucked in the bin. The Secretary of State for Scotland knows very well the problems that the poll tax has created, not only for ordinary men and women but for those on low incomes, invalids, pensioners, and students. It has created problems also for the registration officers, with so many people looking for work moving in and out of districts. Given the Tory party's recent public squabble, I do not know how the Westminster registration officer will manage, because he will need to establish who spent how much time at Chequers and Downing street. The Government have created so many problems for registration officers that they must be going barmy.

We witnessed tonight the ranting and raving of the Secretary of State for the Environment, yet the poll tax was introduced by the Tories, and it is they who should fix it. They should completely abolish it. The Secretary of State huffed and puffed tonight, but what did he tell us? Conservative Members may smile, but I will be smiling when Labour achieves victory at the next general election. The Secretary of State said that he will review the poll tax to see what can be done, and will take on board all the opinions that have been expressed—but that it will take more than two years to abolish it. I call that a miserable situation for some of my constituents.

Perhaps this will get rid of some of the Tory smiles. One of my constituents is unable to pay the poll tax through no fault of her own. Her husband got into difficulty and was bailed out, and when the police tried to arrest him they discovered that he had not paid any poll tax. I have written to the Secretary of State for Scotland about that case, but he can offer no help. Neither can any assistance be given by the local authority, so that that woman is left to pay. How can one get blood out of a stone? How can one get blood out of a woman who is trying to bring up a family on her own? The poll tax makes no allowance for such women, and nor do the Government. If anyone wishes to challenge me, I am happy to produce every document that

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

I have received from the Secretary of State about that case. I do not hear any laughing and joking from Conservative Members now.

Another case concerns a war hero who had half his brain blown away and who is looked after by his caring and adoring wife. He is deemed eligible to pay 20 per cent. poll tax. I think that it is a sick tax on heroes—on people who have sacrificed everything for their country. I have also sent the Secretary of State the letters that I have received from that man's wife in which she makes a plea for a sympathetic hearing of her case by the Government. The Government have shown no sympathy. The pillage continues. The Government are still trying to drain the energies and the pockets of people who desperately need help and support—among them, the elderly, invalids and students.

The Government claim that it is a simple matter to seek poll tax relief, but one is presented with form after form after form. One needs to be a Philadelphia lawyer to understand and complete the paperwork involved, particularly if one is elderly, infirm, or feeling slightly below par. Welfare rights advisers, the staff of unemployment information centres and citizens advice bureaux spend hour after hour trying to sort out the Government's bureaucratic bungling. Yes, Minister—it goes on and on and on, and it is time to bring it to an end.

The Government produced one of the most complicated tax collection systems ever devised. It is a disgrace, and it is not what the people of this country want. Clearly the British people want a property tax based on ability to pay, and on the particular needs of the people about whom I have spoken. It should take into account the circumstances of the mentally handicapped, the less able, and the unemployed. There should be 100 per cent. rebate in such cases. I am here to defend those people—not just the rich or the very wealthy, such as the man who lives in a castle. I must represent also the man living in a tenement or, worse still, the children living in the cardboard cities that the Government created as a consequence of the poll tax.

I am delighted that a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), agrees with me that there should be a property-based tax in place of the poll tax. I hope that when the Secretary of State for Scotland replies tonight he will extend some hope to the millions of people who, for many reasons, are unable to pay the poll tax. It may be because of the huge escalation in their rent or their electricity, food or heating bills. The Government have clearly shown that they are interested only in the welfare of the people at the top of society and in ensuring that they can hang on to their millions. I told the Secretary of State the other night that he ought to hang his head in shame. Tonight the right hon. Gentleman has a chance to hold it up high, by joining us in the Lobby to support the abolition of the poll tax.

6.47 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): We should be grateful to Labour for tabling tonight's motion, because it provides the Government with an opportunity to emphasise that there will be a fundamental review from which no option will be excluded. I warmly welcome that, as does the whole country. The debate has also produced another lamentable performance from members of Labour's Front and Back Benches. The more such opportunities they provide, the more we shall be grateful.

Neither the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) nor Labour Back Benchers referred in any way, shape or form to Labour's own policy document, in which it professes to have so much pride. I do not blame them for failing to mention it, because, in the unlikely event of Labour ever being in a position to implement its provisions, the problems that accompanies our attempts to reform local government taxation will be as nothing by comparison to what they would face. Any attempt to return to the old rating system, as Labour proposes, would be akin to a kamikaze mission.

The previous Government's experience with the rating system and with the Scottish revaluation of the rating system should have made anyone understand, without any shadow of a doubt, that that system was bad and unfair and provided no democratic accountability. Frankly, I am sorry that it took us so long to get rid of it.

My message is simple. The rates were an appalling system of taxation. I argued for many years that we should abolish it as soon as we possibly could. One of the strong arguments against the system was that it provided no democratic accountability, as there were about 12 million ratepayers compared to 35 million voters. However, that was only part of the problem.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moate: No.

A property tax is alien to the concept of fairness. One of the arguments in favour of the community charge is that it would provide better accountability because 35 million people would, in theory, be paying the tax.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moate: No, I shall not.

If the tax had been set at a low level, it is just possible that it might have gained acceptance. I do not believe that any practical system of local government taxation can raise a significant amount of revenue, and that is why I welcome this fundamental review. I fail to understand why, in all the debates on this subject over the years, in every twist and turn that we have made to make the system more fair or more workable, we have never faced up to that fundamental problem. Given our circumstances—the geographical nature of the country and the density of the population—there is no workable and acceptable system of local government taxation.

In support of that proposition, I urge my right hon. Friend to bear in mind the fundamentals, and I remind the House of the figures. All the turmoil which we and the Opposition Front Bench have plunged ourselves into, is due to a form of taxation—*[Interruption.]* Let me make this point clear. It is due to a form of taxation which raises only about 6 per cent. of all Government revenue—with about 100 per cent. of the pain. Total revenue raised in this country is about £200 billion. At present, after rebates and relief, net community charge amounts to £11·4 billion. Why do we torture ourselves in this way to raise a relatively small part of total taxation? Compare it with the amount raised in tobacco taxes, which is £5 billion, value

added tax, which raises £30 billion, fuel tax, which raises £9 billion, national insurance receipts of £33 billion and income tax, which is about £55 billion.

That point is important. If one asks the man in the street how he would like to pay for Government services, including local government—through the community charge, a property tax, the rates or on a pay-as-you-earn and pay-as-you-spend basis—I have no doubt that the vast majority would say that they wanted to pay as they earned, and as they spent. *[Interruption.]* I am advocating that we should do it, and I am on the record as saying exactly the same thing many years ago. None of the forms of taxation that hon. Members seem to be crying out for seem to be workable or acceptable. If we are genuinely looking for a system of taxation which is to work into the 21st century, and be accepted, I urge that we consider the fundamental principle of whether to transfer the tax on to central taxation and work on the principle of a central Government grant to local authorities.

Of course, many will argue that that would undermine local government, but I do not believe that local government would be destroyed by it. It would still be accountable to the electorate for the manner in which it spent the money.

Mr. Buckley: How can the hon. Gentleman make such a contribution to the debate? He has ruled out all the options. The Minister said that all options were open. Now the hon. Gentleman has suggested a central levy of taxation, which will be distributed to local government on an agency basis. If the Minister is going to have direct control of local government finances, where is the accountability?

Mr. Moate: I am glad that all the options are open. However, I am urging that we consider the option of transferring all revenue-raising power to central Government—*[Interruption.]* I hope that Opposition Members will listen to my point of view, because I think that they will get themselves into just as big a tangle as every other Government have done for the past 20 or 30 years.

As regards accountability, we already accept that 75 per cent. of revenue from taxation is raised centrally, and passed out by way of Government grants. In every proposition, whether increasing the range of exemptions, which is put forward by the Opposition, or by transferring teachers' salaries to central Government, we reduce the total net benefit which comes from local taxation revenue. Must there not come a time when total net yield becomes so low that it undermines the argument about accountability? I suggest that we have virtually reached that point.

More and more, when I talk to local councillors, I find that they would be more than ready to accept an increase in grants, and to do away with this nonsense and farce of local government taxation. We are virtually at that point. Services which were previously administered by councils are moving out of the political arena. In some constituencies, such as my own, housing is now entirely controlled by housing associations. Many functions which were previously political are no longer political. Is that not another argument—that the more we struggle to raise local government revenue, the more trouble we shall get and the more irrelevant it will be?

My message is simple. We are torturing ourselves over an illusion. We are seeking to raise a small amount of tax locally and we are creating systems that are painfully unjust to a vast number of people. There is only one way to arrange for everyone to make a contribution to the services that they enjoy—a mixture of pay-as-you-earn and pay-as-you-spend. I urge my right hon. Friends properly to consider and analyse that simple proposition.

6.57 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): As a Merseyside Member of Parliament, I join other hon. Members who have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on an excellent maiden speech, and I hope that he will give us the benefit of his experience of the manifest and many problems of Merseyside on many occasions.

In a very thin speech, the Secretary of State said that his review of the poll tax would cover a period of two years. That has more to do with the Tory party timetable and prospects for the general election than with anything else, and I view it with some scepticism.

The Secretary of State does not require two years to correct the disgraceful unfairness of his Department's standard spending assessments. I hope that the Secretary of State for the Environment—free from the threat of the prime ministerial handbagging, which accompanied his predecessors' every move—will listen carefully to my argument about standard spending assessments.

St. Helens was capped, despite the evidence that the spending assessments, rather than the council's decisions, had caused the problem. The political overtones of that capping are obvious. Even though St. Helens had the second lowest rate on Merseyside, before the poll tax, it was capped. The obscenity was that other Tory council budgets, set after poll tax, were wildly above their spending assessments, yet they were not capped.

St. Helens council is committed to providing decent, basic services, especially for the elderly, good education services and help for the needy. Indeed, most urban councils have a higher expenditure burden because of the non-statutory services needed to help redress disadvantage. That needs to be understood if the Secretary of State does re-examine the SSAs. The greater the spread of social problems, the higher will be the cost of council services.

The point that I want to drive home to the new Secretary of State is that the level of poll tax in St. Helens has little to do with the council's efficiency, and everything to do with the size of Government grant. The poll tax level rests on the foundation stone of the spending assessment—of decisions made by the Secretary of State. He decides the amount of assistance that every council in the country should receive to provide its services.

The original argument—that poll tax would increase the accountability of councillors—has long since evaporated. Councillors' fortunes are now largely controlled by central Government decisions on spending. Let me give an example. It might be thought that a child at risk of abuse was in need of the same help regardless of where it lived, but that is not how the Government see it. Tory Westminster council receives twice as much central Government money for children at risk as Labour St. Helens. No London weighting can account for such a disparity. In this instance, higher grants mean a smaller burden for poll tax payers.

[Mr. John Evans]

When Westminster's spending assessments are compared with those of St. Helens, the result looks positively corrupt. If the Minister consults, for instance, the Macmillan guide to retirement, he will see that the average rates bill per head in St. Helens was less than half that in Westminster—£208, compared with £501. Now, St. Helens' poll tax is twice Westminster's. The poll tax spending assessments carry more than a whiff of political favour.

Unemployment, which was taken into account in the old rate support grant, is not now considered a factor in the spending assessments. If it were still included, St. Helens would receive a much higher grant; but, for political reasons, it was dropped by previous Secretaries of State.

Unemployment creates poverty, and poverty creates children in need. Unemployment increases the demands on education, because low achievement goes hand in hand with unemployment. Unemployment creates extra needs across the range of services, from advice shops to libraries. Unemployment is running at about 10 per cent. in my constituency. Why, then, have the Government ignored such a vital factor?

We can see what sort of record Tory councils are busy establishing. They receive massive SSA handouts to cover basic needs, which immediately reduce the poll tax bill in authorities that the Tories regard as "flagships". Then, to drive the poll tax down further, they look for what they call "efficiencies". What are these "efficiencies"? Let me tell the Minister: they are the non-statutory services which have always been designed to improve the quality of life for the less affluent and the poor.

Wandsworth is closing down day centres for the elderly. Tory authorities across the country fail to provide decent nursery education. Meals-on-wheels services are slashed. Schools' resources are cut, not for educational reasons but to drive down the poll tax. And who benefits? Of course, those on the margins of poverty pay a slightly lower poll tax; but, if those same poorer people need legal advice, they cannot obtain it if, as in Wandsworth, the law centres are being closed. If they have to work and cannot afford private care for an aging relative, they are in a bind, because help centres have been closed. The fact is that the affluent benefit most from the poll tax.

There is one shining example of the real motivation of Tory poll tax cutters. The new leader of Hillingdon council, Tory Andrew Boff, supported one increase in expenditure while cutting anything else that looked remotely social. He raised councillors' expenses by 70 per cent. while cuts were being made in care for the elderly.

The spending assessments tabled by the former Secretary of State made everyone associated with local government in St. Helens despair. Most Cabinet Ministers, including the present Secretary of State, send or have sent their children to private schools. If we had a voucher system for education, tied to the unit cost of the state secondary education demanded of St. Helens, and a Government rule that no parent could supplement that amount by more than 10 per cent. of its value—the capping rule—Tory Cabinet Ministers would not be able to find a private school in this country for their children.

Tory Ministers pride themselves on paying attention to careful spending. The bald facts speak for themselves: if the Government's SSAs were sufficient to provide quality education, they would not spend their money on sending their own children to private schools. I want the same treatment for children in St. Helens whose parents could not afford to send them to private schools even if they wanted to. But that is not good enough for this Tory Cabinet. Its members spend thousands each year in school fees, and then tell my council that, if it spends half that amount per child in its schools, its budgets will be capped. That is an absolute disgrace.

My constituents—whose average income is somewhat smaller than those of Tory Cabinet Ministers—do not have the choice. The cruel irony is that the children in my area need the investment far more that those who are already privileged. I believe that this is known as "equal opportunity". But the position is even worse than that. The spending assessment per secondary pupil for St. Helens is £1,433; in neighbouring Liverpool, it is £1,717. That means that every school with 1,000 pupils is better funded by no less than £284,000 a year in Liverpool than in St. Helens, yet participation levels in further education and examination grades in no way justify such wide differentials.

In St. Helens last year, every poll tax payer had to contribute £8 per head to pay the debts of the Mersey tunnels, which my constituents do not use. In other words, the margins on extra permissible spending were already diminished by nearly 2 per cent. for a service that the people do not use. I fail to see why authorities that already benefit from tourism should receive additional special grants while the Government refuse to dislocate the costs of the tunnels from St. Helens' poll tax.

Any Minister who walks around my constituency will see that it does not begin to compare with the affluence of Wandsworth or Westminster, let alone that of the ranks of Tory authorities elsewhere in the south-east; yet if my authority received as much SSA as Wandsworth—which used it to set a poll tax amounting to a mere £148—it could have given everyone in St. Helens a substantial cheque.

St. Helens has been praised by visiting Ministers, the CBI, local business men and, most of all, the voters who re-elected the council last May. It has played a central role in helping to cement an economic partnership between industry and the community. It is a hard-working council, which acts for and is accountable to the community. The most recent spending assessments, however, did nothing to build on that effort; indeed, they jeopardised it.

I call on the new Secretary of State to abolish what the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), called

"a grave error of judgment"—

the poll tax. Before doing so, however, he has the chance to prove his mettle by restructuring the SSAs, especially those relating to education and social services, and reintroducing unemployment as a factor in grant support. If he fails to do that, we shall know that his leadership promises, and the speech that he made today, were simply empty rhetoric.

7.7 pm

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): The first mistake in this sad and sorry saga was the original commitment to abolish the domestic rates. That commitment should not have been made until we had agreed that there was a specific, demonstrably better alternative.

My own view has always been that it would have been relatively easy for us to adjust the old-style rating system to deal with its unfairnesses—perhaps using a multiplier to take account of the numbers in a household, or some form of earnings multiplier, together with, possibly, a national uniform charge payable by non-ratepayers so that everyone would make a contribution. That would have proved incomparably easier and cheaper than the quagmire in which we find ourselves now: a policy that, as has already been said today, has—sadly—moved money from the have-nots to the haves.

The reality is that there was no expert independent support in the country for the community charge, and no one now claims any credit for it. Its godfathers have gone for good. This wretched policy was driven through the House—our parliamentary party was clubbed and conned—and was carted around the country by a succession of Ministers, with limited conviction and even more limited success.

Of course, once the Government realised the full horror of what they had unleashed, they tried to make amends. Exemptions, transitional relief, safety nets, area protection, rebates, capping—we dug the hole deeper and deeper. It is true that some measure of accountability arose and that charge levels were hotly debated, but the public—except in areas of gross excesses by certain Labour authorities—became totally confused. In my Pendle constituency, where there is a Liberal local authority, a Labour Lancashire county council and a Conservative national Government, everyone throws grenades at each other. It is well known that a local authority such as Pendle, an historically low-rated area, has suffered greatly from the charge. Indeed, the "Pendle factor" is now an acknowledged term in any poll tax debate.

Let me give the House a few facts that demonstrate our problem. Pendle has 17,000 terraced properties where the average rateable value was £60 and where the average rates payable amounted to £166. Our first year community charge of £299 meant that 75 per cent. of my constituents were worse off and that 90 per cent. of two-person households were worse off. The average increase for a three-person household was no less than 423 per cent. In a thrifty, predominantly low-earning community with a high ethnic factor, the scale of hardship and ensuing bitterness can be appreciated.

Approximately 30 per cent. of charge payers—19,000 people—receive some form of community charge benefit. There have been no fewer than 46,000 separate movements in community charge benefits locally. Moreover, 23 additional staff are needed to administer the poll tax and benefits. The cost of collection amounts to £11·82 per charge-payer—twice that for rates. By 30 November, 8 per cent.—or 5,000 people—had paid nothing. Only 57 per cent. of the total collection had been received after seven months, compared with 78 per cent. for rates at the same period. The resulting revenue loss means that each Pendle charge payer will have to find £21 next year.

What is to be done? My local authority would like the safety net to be phased out over 10 years rather than four, with transitional relief based on actual rather than notional expenditure. My 371 parliamentary colleagues seem to have 371 pet schemes to improve the community charge. I wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and his ministerial colleagues well as they take soundings.

For myself, if we are just trying to ameliorate the worst effects of the community charge in the short term, I would favour a simple discount formula, with the head of household paying 100 per cent. of the charge, the second person in the household paying perhaps 50 per cent. of the charge, with the third and any additional occupiers paying 25 per cent. of the charge. If that formula could be afforded, it would substantially ease the compounding effect of the charge on many households.

I am now of the view, however, that there is a limit to the amount of propping up and repair work that can be done. In our next manifesto I believe that we must commit ourselves to total repeal and start again. A change of Prime Minister has given us that opportunity. We must look again at the structure of local government financing. There must not be another occasion in history when an admiral has been destroyed by his own flagship.

7.12 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): When the poll tax was first proposed, we were told that one of its objectives was to abolish the inequities of the rating system. Another objective was local accountability. No Opposition Member would disagree that there were inequities and anomalies under the old domestic rating system and that it would be good to abolish those inequities and anomalies. That is precisely what the next Labour Government intend to do, as we have heard today and in recent weeks. However, as we know to our cost, the Tory Government abolished the rating system and replaced it with the poll tax which, in terms of inequity and anomaly, leaves the domestic rating system standing. All the problems and suffering of which the Tory Government were warned have come to pass. Only now, when the Tory Government realise that they too will be held accountable by the electorate, have they decided to embark on a damage limitation exercise.

What has been the Government's answer to the problem? They have decided to ask the Labour party to help them out. If a group of bandits were to set fire to my home and stand back laughing as it burned, I could not be expected to be grateful to them if they helped to douse the fire when the wind changed and the flames turned on them. That is the position of the Tory party over the poll tax. The Government have inflicted great suffering on millions of people. They imposed it in the full knowledge of what they were doing and of the damage that it would cause. They therefore cannot expect to be forgiven because they now see that they have created a danger for themselves and want to save their own skin. The goings-on of the last two weeks have been part of that process.

On Second Reading of the 1987 Bill, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) warned of the potential damage that the poll tax would do and predicted that it would be dubbed a Tory tax, but he was concerned not so much about its effects on people as about its effect on the Tory party. The new Prime Minister cannot escape his responsibility, either. He supported the poll tax throughout by voting for it, arguing its merits and deriding those who opposed it. The Government know that the change of face at the top will not resolve their problems. They will therefore step up the propaganda and promise policy changes at some future date—jam tomorrow, as it was described by one of the Secretary of State's own Ministers.

[Mr. David Clelland]

The Government will first engage, however, in their now common strategy of trying to shift the blame on to local councillors. The former Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), fired the first shot in the latest round on 30 November. On Radio 4, he said:

"Local government expenditure has been surging over recent years."

That statement was supported on Monday of this week by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities when he, too, referred to

"enormous increases in local authority spending".—*[Official Report,* 3 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 42.]

Today, the Secretary of State has made similar allegations.

The facts are completely contrary to what these "honourable" gentlemen proclaim. If we look at table 2.2 of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's finance and general statistics for 1989-90, what do we see? At constant prices, local authority expenditure between 1979-80 and 1987-88 increased by an average of only 1·5 per cent. per year, or a total of 15 per cent. over the period, whereas central Government expenditure over the same period, using the same basis, increased by 22 per cent. Who, therefore, are the overspenders?

What is true is that there has been a huge increase in local taxes—first the rates and now the poll tax—but people might ask, how can that be if expenditure has not increased significantly? The answer is that, in 1979, about 63 per cent. of local government expenditure was met by Government grants; now, it is less than 50 per cent. For the same expenditure, therefore, local payers—business and domestic—now have to find over 50 per cent. of the bill, as opposed to only 37 per cent. 10 years ago.

For proof of what I say, I need turn to no less an authority than the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), who was one of the principal lieutenants of the new Secretary of State for the Environment during the race for the Tory leadership two weeks ago. When asked in a television interview how his candidate would deal with the problem of the poll tax, he said:

"We will shift the burden of local expenditure from local to central Government. It has all been going the other way over recent years."

I think that I quote the hon. Gentleman accurately. How right he was when he said that it has all been going the other way over recent years. What he did not say was that it was his man who was one of the principal architects of the process. That is why bills have increased while services have been cut. That is why poll tax bills are so much higher than they should be, or need to be.

The Tory party has tried to create the illusion of being the party of tax cuts, when in fact it has been the party of tax increases. While it is true that income tax has been cut, as the hon. Member for East Lindsey rightly observed, the burden of tax was not removed but shifted on to local government and the poll tax payer. The Tory party now hopes that it can fool the voters into believing that the poll tax was something invented by "'er indoors" and has nothing to do with the new regime. The Tory party would need an entire flock of sheep before it could get anywhere near to pulling the wool over the eyes of my constituents, not because they can quote chapter and verse of expenditure statistics but because they are living at the sharp end of the cuts in services and the effects on their quality of life. They know the real results of poll tax and poll tax capping.

They certainly know a lot better than the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) who on Monday said that councils bleat about cuts which never occur. Perhaps the Minister should take his head out of the sand and stop talking through his poll tax cap. Is he not aware of the massive cut in housing provision over the past 10 years? In 1979, Newcastle upon Tyne built 1,300 houses for its people. As a result of deliberate Tory Government policy, last year it built just four bungalows, despite the fact that the need is as great as if not greater than, in 1979.

Would the Minister care to visit the old lady I went to see last Monday? She has just lost her home help because the council was forced to decide who needed a home help the most. That is as a result of budget cuts over the past three years and cuts of 86 staff, resulting in 500 pensioners losing the help that they rely on. The lady I visited is almost deaf, she is 80 years old and is scarcely able to walk. She can just about flick a duster if she holds it in a certain way in hands crippled with arthritis. She has been declared not as frail as others, who have therefore taken a higher priority.

Does the Minister understand that that is the sort of decision that local councillors and their officers have to take day by day under this Government? If he does not, the people at the sharp end certainly do. They know who is to blame. Because of poll tax capping, the screw will be tightened further next year. In Newcastle, six old people's homes are threatened with closure. Home help services will be cut yet again, and charges may be imposed. Meals on wheels may be axed and services to the needy and the voluntary sector, supported by the council, such as Newcastle law centre, the centre for the unemployed and many others, are in danger of losing their funding and closing down. Are those the benefits of capping to which the Minister referred on Monday and which he said should be passed on to the poll tax payer?

Even at this stage on their road to Damascus, the Tories fail to realise that people are not stupid. I recently met the people of Scotswood to discuss the ever-increasing chaos and disturbance caused by mindless hooligans driving recklessly through housing estates in stolen cars—a practice that recently resulted in the tragic death of a small baby. They were only too painfully aware of the effect on their quality of life of 11 years of Tory Government and of how the council has its hands tied behind its back. They are crying out not for cuts but for help.

However, the Government's poll tax policies were firmed up on Monday under the new Prime Minister and the Secretary of State and, even if the people were to say to the council, "Look, put a couple of pounds on the poll tax and spend the money on providing a decent environment for our families," it could not do it. The wishes of the people, even if they voted for the council at the local election, will be ignored. They will be ignored not by the council but by the Government, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. So much for local accountability.

No doubt the Minister will tell us again, as he did on Monday, that the Government are putting £3 billion extra into local government next year. However, that money will not help increase or improve education, social services,

housing or any other service, because councils' expenditure levels are still determined by the Government. That £3 billion is to keep down the level of the poll tax and thereby the level of hostility against the Government. That £3 billion is not for the services or the people but for the Tory party.

7.22 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): I was one of the Conservative Members who voted against the community charge on Second and Third Reading. I did so because, although I acknowledged that there were unfairnesses in the old domestic rating system which needed to be put right, I feared that the community charge would simply replace the old unfairnesses with new and more serious ones. I am very much afraid that my fears have been proved right—*[Interruption.]* Before Opposition Members become too over-confident, I must remind them that by no means all the unfairnesses of the community charge are the fault of the community charge itself. Many of them stem from high-spending Labour councils.

My constituency of Ipswich is an example of that. At £440, we have the 20th highest community charge in the country. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to hear that we have a Labour-controlled borough council. It is true that the greater part of the community charge is the responsibility of the Conservative-controlled county council, but that is because it is has to meet the large spending elements of education and the social services. The real key is the contrast as regards standard spending assessments. Conservative-controlled Suffolk county council exceeded its standard spending assessment by 9 per cent. while Labour-controlled Ipswich borough council exceeded its standard spending assessment by a staggering and disgraceful 97 per cent.

It sickens me when Labour councils which indulge in such over-spending then weep salt tears over the plight of community charge payers who have difficulty meeting their bills. It sickens me nearly as much as the kind of speech—rant is probably a better word—that we heard from the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), putting forward the views of the "can't pay, won't pay" school. That is totally contemptible. It is contemptible, too, for other Opposition Members to indicate agreement with the hon. Gentleman's views. Those who do that must face the consequence that because they are not paying, their less well-to-do constituents will have to pay more. Someone has to stump up the difference, and it is the ordinary community charge payer who does so—*[Interruption.]* I can tell Opposition Members who are cheering that many community charge payers who are highly critical of the Government for the community charge are also intensely indignant at those who do not meet their community charge commitments.

For all that, and for all my criticisms of the Opposition and Labour-controlled councils, there are unfairnesses stemming from the operation of the community charge which need to be put right. That is why I welcome the Government's commitment to a thorough, constructive and fundamental review of the kind that we have been promised. I welcome the fact that heading the Department of the Environment as Secretary of State we have one of the initial mainline opponents of the community charge, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Mr. Young) as Minister of State, who also honourably opposed the community charge at the outset. The fact that they are both in the Department of the Environment and charged with carrying out the review gives me much greater confidence that there will be an effective review. I know that that feeling is shared by many of my constituents.

There are certain points that I should like to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to take into account as they carry out their review. I was glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State enunciate the principle that everyone should contribute something. That principle is right and commands a wide measure of cross-party support. There must also be better accountability. Accountability was put forward as the great merit of the community charge. It may work where there is a unitary authority, but it comes under strain where there are two local authorities. Where in a constituency such as mine there are two local authorities of different political persuasions, it breaks down altogether.

Conservative-controlled Suffolk county council and Labour-controlled Ipswich borough council could not agree what proportion of the community charge each was responsible for, and accountability broke down completely. I sought expert advice and was told that what was needed was a "standard disaggregation formula". When I asked the Department of the Environment what that was, I was told that no such formula was on offer. We need to establish better accountability.

The third principle is that the new system must be seen to be fair. In my view, that involves linking the tax more effectively to people's ability to pay and ending the unfair anomaly whereby, if a wife gives up employment to stay at home and look after the children, she and her husband have to pay two community charges out of one income. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is learning."] I am not learning—I realised that from the start, and that is why I voted against it. Such unfairnesses cause real hardship and they must be fairly and squarely put right in the review.

Finally, it is most important that, in deciding how to raise money for local government finance, my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment should give great weight to administrative efficiency—to the principles of cheapness and the certainty of collection. That will not only save money and thus help to reduce everyone's contribution to local government finance; it will be good in itself. It is easy to call for administrative efficiency and agree on the need for it, but it is devilishly difficult to achieve it. Nevertheless, it is most important that those charged with the review should keep it in mind as their principal aim.

7.31 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I shall not try to follow the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine). As he is a pretty fair hon. Member, however, I hope to explain to him why I have taken a stand and perhaps to convince him that there is a certain efficacy in not paying.

The Secretary of State tried to take the heat out of the debate by promising a long review and trying to lure hon. Members on both sides of the House into his deliberations. Perhaps the Minister of State, who is on the Front Bench, will ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is to reply to the debate, to answer this question: what did the Secretary of State for the Environment mean by a "stable and just basis"? May we have an explanation of that? The

[Mr. Dick Douglas]

Secretary of State for the Environment will have to spell that out before any of us enters into discussions to try to assist him.

It is all very well for Conservative Members to repent now and tell us how wrong the poll tax is. It is a matter of shameful record that in Scotland we have had it since 1989. The amendment tabled by my hon. Friends in the Scottish National party calls on the House to congratulate

"the people of Scotland in maintaining principled resistance to the poll tax".

The heat may have been taken out of the debate, but I can tell the House that the heat is still on in Scotland. Lest there should be any doubt about that, I refer the Minister of State to the various meetings that Ministers have had with the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities. The poll tax in Scotland is collapsing and the process will not wait for a two-year review. Once it gets out that Ministers intend not to ameliorate the poll tax but to abolish it in all but name, it will collapse apace. *[Interruption.]* Do I get injury time for this, I wonder?

In 1987, the people of Scotland rejected the tax through the ballot box. The poll tax became a priority subject for Labour's 50 Scottish Members. A statement of policy at the 1988 party conference in Perth said:

"many individuals, understanding the consequences of their action, will chose to accept the civil penalty involved in non-payment. The Labour Party does not rule out a non-payment campaign."

In a further statement, made in September 1988, the Labour party said:

"Labour does not believe that a campaign of non-payment . . . can be considered as a way to defeat the tax."

We were told that the only way to defeat the tax was to elect a Labour Government. But the statement recognised:

"many individuals view this tax to be so abhorrent, its introduction to be so vindictive that they may make their own personal stand by not paying it . . . We recognise their right to do so."

"But," said the Labour party, "for God's sake, don't tell anyone. Don't have a mass campaign. Sit at home and do not let on." That is the posture of the Labour party.

It is against the background of those statements that we must set the position of the Leader of the Opposition, who made his views plain in January 1988, telling people that to disobey the law would be "futile illegality". The right hon. Gentleman expressed his views in ringing tones. I told the right hon. Gentleman that I intended to refer to him, so I make no apology for my remarks. *[Interruption.]* It would have been better to have the organ grinder rather than the monkey, in the form of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

What has happened in Scotland? So many people have disobeyed the law that its legitimacy has been called into question. Of 3·7 million poll tax payers, 1,200,000 have been issued with summary warrants—700,000 of them sheriff officer warrants. Have we had 1,200,000 instances of futile illegality? Some of those involved can pay but will not pay as a matter of principle. The vast majority cannot pay. Is that futile illegality?

The Labour party promised to set up mechanisms to ensure that everything possible was done to protect the poorer sections of the population. What it did not say was that those mechanisms would include making poll tax deductions from income support—59,000 applications to obtain £1·85 a week from single people and £2·90 from married couples and 59,000 expressions of a forced illegality visited on the poorer sections of the population. In his remarks last week, the Leader of the Opposition offered them sympathy. Will his sympathy cards be wrapped up inside sheriff warrants sent out by Labour regional councils? *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Garscadden may find that humorous; I do not think it is humorous. I have had warrants sent to my home under a system administered by a Labour council. I have had sheriff officers breaking down my door, terrorising my disabled daughter.

Mr. Dewar: Oh.

Mr. Douglas: Yes, in the house. The hon. Gentleman should get up. Get up, then I will give way.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman should have thought about it.

Mr. Douglas: Of course I thought about it. The hon. Gentleman said that it would never happen to me but it did, and the warrant was declared void. Get up now.

Mr. Dewar: I have not risen to my feet on the hon. Gentleman's instruction.

If the process was so traumatic, why did not the hon. Gentleman think about the position in which he was placing his family in the first place?

Mr. Douglas: I did that. The door was broken down illegally. What will the hon. Gentleman say, as a lawyer, if somebody goes to him in those circumstances? Will he tell that person to obey the law?—[HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is not a lawyer."] He is a lawyer. I apologise to the Chair. The poll tax is a farce. The warrant was declared void, but the regional council is appealing, as it may be entitled to do. That is what happened on the basis of one warrant. What a farce.

The Labour banners that I stood up for and under were those with the badges of John MacLean, Jimmy Maxton, Lansbury and Hardie. I was brought up on that heritage on Clydeside. My earliest memories are of standing beside——

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman will be giving us Ramsay MacDonald next.

Mr. Douglas: No; it is Ramsay MacKinnock.

When I was about five, I stood beside neighbours when their doors were broken down by fire axes and their furniture dragged out. Those memories burn deep within me. However, that tradition of resistance cannot be seen in the current Labour party, with the exception of a few hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), if I can embarrass him by so applauding him. That tradition is no longer there, because it would not suit the Mandelson image of respectability. It would not get those in the Labour party a shot at the limousines.

In Scotland, the tradition of John MacLean is married to a more ancient tradition that goes back to the 14th century. I make no apologies for quoting the Declaration of Arbroath, which stated:

"For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honour, but it is Liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which NO honest man will lose but with his life".

If other people had thought about liberty and freedom rather than being party hacks and marching through Lobbies, we would not be having this debate. If more

people had put liberty and freedom first, as did members of the Scottish National party and, to their credit, some Labour supporters, we would not be having this debate today, because we would not have the poll tax.

7.41 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I do not think that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), for whom I have a high regard, would regard me as Lobby fodder on this issue. I did not support the introduction of the poll tax or the community charge in Scotland; nor have I voted for it on any occasion since. However, much as I respect the hon. Gentleman's principles, on this occasion I believe that they are misplaced. There is a heavy duty on all hon. Members to obey the law whether we like it or not.

I was greatly encouraged by the remarkable speech this afternoon of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. It was one of the most remarkable speeches that we have heard in the Chamber for a long time. It addressed the fundamental issues of local government—the importance of not divorcing financing from structures—and it put forward some positive proposals, to which I shall return later.

As someone who has been a long-standing and continuous opponent of this charge or tax, I should like to say that of course it will take time to have a thorough review. All hon. Members must be realistic; we must not delude those who look to us from outside, who are following the debate with great interest and concern. However, certain categories of people can and should be helped immediately. I should like to make a plea, through my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) who is in his place on the Treasury Bench, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to look at certain categories.

I have in mind couples who are living in terraced houses. There are not many in my constituency, but there are in the constituencies of my hon. Friends, and in the west midlands generally. Those low-rated properties are often occupied by couples who have been frugal and prudent but who do not have the necessary qualifications for a rebate. Nevertheless, their rates charge of £200 or £300 has been translated into a community charge of £700 or £800. A gentleman came to see me not so long ago and asked, "What shall I give up, my holiday or my motor car?" We should not put people of that sort into that position. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give them his earnest consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) referred to mobile homes. I, too, have many constituents living in mobile homes, which are strangely named because most of them are far from mobile. Many of them are beautiful, with lovely gardens, and are tended with great care. They are "homes" in every sense of that word. It is wrong that the people living in them should be taxed in the same way as I am taxed. The flat rate has always been my fundamental objection to the charge.

I also hope that something can be done about students. Although the fact that they pay 20 per cent. means that they have an 80 per cent. rebate, nevertheless, if they are coping with a loan and other things and are dependent upon their parents, that 20 per cent. can be a substantial charge.

I hope that something can also be done to assist non-earning spouses—most, but not all, of whom are wives. Those categories of people can and should be helped immediately. They can be helped in the very short term, and I hope they will be.

I have always felt that there is merit in a property-based tax because it bears some relationship to ability to pay. On several occasions in the 1970s, I introduced a private Member's Bill on rating reform. I even had my right hon. Friends the Members for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) as my co-sponsors on one occasion. The aim of that particular Bill was to keep the rating base but to make each adult wage earner pay something. That is still possibly the best solution.

I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it plain that he has ruled out nothing because that is the only way to have a fundamental review. Great credit accrues to any Government who are prepared to say, "Yes, we have listened, and yes, we have realised." I have enormous respect for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his courage in saying that so quickly after assuming the highest office, for bringing into the Cabinet my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who is a man of infinite experience and wisdom in these matters, and for saying to him, "Please deal with this."

I have one suggestion for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. He talked this afternoon about bringing hon. Members of all parties into the discussion. That is a sound idea. After all, if we are going to alter the structure of local government finance, this time we want to alter it for a generation or two, not for just a few years. If we can have a basis of consensus on the structure—not necessarily on the levels, because there will, of course, be many arguments about that and about the detail—that will be very much for the better, and local government will be properly served.

Therefore, I suggest that we do something that we have not done very often in the past and that we set up a Special Select Committee to deal with this subject. We should not simply refer the matter to the Select Committee on the Environment, admirable though it is. A Special Select Committee should be set up, consisting of hon. Members of known experience and expertise in this area, of whom there are many in all parties. They should be asked to look at this matter and to report back to the House.

I am not suggesting that my right hon. Friend should not do other things simultaneously—of course he should, and doubtless he will. He will consult those who serve in local government and take opinions from all over the realm, because he is a man who really listens. That is absolutely right and proper. However, I believe that hon. Members have a particular role to play. I hope very much that the sort of Committee to which I have referred could be given serious consideration and the remit that I have outlined.

One of the best things about the House—I have now been a Member for 20 years—is that Select Committees quickly push aside partisan considerations and look at the merits of an issue. I found that when I served on the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts. We produced very good reports in the 1979 Parliament, which were almost always unanimous. Hon. Members put aside their party differences to look at the issues and discuss them on

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

their merits. This issue is so important that it deserves the setting up of a Special Select Committee, and I hope that that suggestion will be passed to my right hon. Friend.

We all bear a share of the responsibility for the mess we are in—and there is a mess. We do not have a satisfactory system, but, as my hon. Friends have rightly pointed out, we would not be in that position if it were not for the profligate spending of many authorities, most of which —I should say, all of which—are Labour-controlled.

I should like to end, not on a partisan note, but on one on which I hope we shall all agree.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): My hon. Friend has just said to Opposition Members that the problem has been with us a long time and they tried to say that it had not. But we are now in the 25th anniversary year of Anthony Crosland's great speech to the effect that "the party's over". He was an honoured member of the Labour party, who said that local government had had their own way for years. Some one in nine of the working population of this country are employed by town halls and have not been accountable for years. Now, for the first time, they are accountable, and whatever happens as a result of the review, they must remain accountable.

Mr. Cormack: I am sure we would all agree that accountability is important, but we have not got it right yet.

We have a chance to look at the system again—we have a new Prime Minister and Secretary of State, both of whom have pledged that they will get it right and said that it is sensible to consult widely. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made some specific appeals and suggestions this afternoon. I have suggested how one of the problems might be tackled—*[Interruption.]* It would be helpful if Opposition Members did not engage in a slanging match with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell).

We are on the eve of a major and beneficial change and I am delighted to pledge my total support to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister.

7.51 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I do not deny the sincerity of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and his constructive response to the Secretary of State, but I advise him that, as I was walking out of the Chamber, I overheard one of his hon. Friends saying, "That's good—it's better than setting up a royal commission; it will see us through the next general election." There seem to be different views on and responses to the Secretary of State's offer.

Many of this afternoon's contributions have involved the effect of the poll tax on individuals, but I shall concentrate on the destruction of a city by the poll tax. I was concerned when I heard the Secretary of State mention the period of two years, because some cities in this country cannot last two years. The city from which I come, Sheffield, will have to face horrendous problems in the next two financial years. The anomalies of the poll tax calculation affect the city of Sheffield.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State's remarks about the regeneration of our great cities. It is true that many of those cities were devastated in the early 1980s. Sheffield did not escape: it suffered 50,000 job losses in the steel and engineering industry. The knock-on effect created an almost unmanageable position.

Mr. Favell: Like Firth Brown's?

Mr. Caborn: Yes, I was the convenor of shop stewards at Firth Brown. When I left in 1979, there were 8,000 people in that sector of the industry; there are now 2,000.

We all came together in Sheffield in the mid-1980s—the chamber of commerce, the trade unions, the universities and polytechnics. We started to look at the restructuring and regeneration of that great city, and we considered the diversification of the industrial and economic base. Part of the regeneration package was to change the institutions, upgrade the city's skills, develop its infrastructure and ensure technology transfer within the city, with the science and technology parks. Those developments occurred in the private and public sectors, and now they are all at risk because the standard spending assessment under the poll tax has devastated the city.

The second aspect of the city of Sheffield that militates against an objective standard spending assessment is its boundaries. I represent Sheffield, Central, the 10th poorest constituency in the United Kingdom. One of the five other constituencies in Sheffield has the highest level of academic qualifications per head of population anywhere in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is a city in which some parts are poor and others are affluent. When the figures are averaged out, they do not look too bad, but the inner-city problems in Sheffield are as acute as in any other major city in the United Kingdom. Sheffield's demographic composition militates against an objective standard spending assessment.

If there were 7 per cent. inflation under the 1991 level of spending, in 1991-92 the city council would require £410 million compared with the maximum budget we could get under the new poll tax arrangement of £354 million—the figure permitted under the Government's poll tax capping criteria. The anticipated level of reserves for 1991-92 to bridge that gap is £20 million—and that would be scraping the bottom of the barrel. That leaves us with a deficit—I hope that the civil servants are listening, because the figures have already been presented once—of £36 million on the year 1991-92. When the figure is rolled on to the year 1992-93, it is compounded and there is a £60 million deficit, because of the narrow base on which the SSA is calculated and the historical factor.

In 1980, Sheffield was entering the recession. Calculated on the census of 1981, the SSA does not reflect the social problems related to the restructuring of Sheffield. It seems ridiculous that the overall growth allowed for Sheffield is 9 per cent., whereas Westminster can have 35·1 per cent. growth and Wandsworth can have 23 per cent. growth, when they do not have Sheffield's social problems.

There are many individual cases in Sheffield, as in other cities. This afternoon, the Secretary of State referred to restructuring and regeneration, of which education was a major component. The national average for education under the SSA is 9·7 per cent., but Sheffield's SSA is 5·6 per cent. Some £6 million has been taken off the Sheffield figure because we cannot reduce the capacity in the schools and reorganise the system to reflect the changes in pupil numbers as fast as the Government want us to. That has

been criticised by the Audit Commission, which said that the Department of Education and Science were asking for the impossible.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) referred to the additional educational needs index. How can Sheffield be granted £400 less per secondary pupil than that calculated for Manchester when they are similar cities? The formula for calculating SSAs for education is based on outdated, narrowly based information, and the multiplying factor involved compounds the errors of the calculation. In Sheffield, when we distribute that expenditure evenly with the local management of schools, we find that those who suffer live in the inner-city districts —that pattern is repeated throughout the education service.

The other sector that is crucial to the regeneration of any major city is other district services which are part of the build-up for the SSAs and the poll tax. We have been told about a great partnership throughout the country, but on average, authorities have received a 4 per cent. increase in funds for economic regeneration and planning and for the environment. Sheffield has received a 9 per cent. cut, which will have a major long-term effect on the regeneration of the city.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North went into great detail about social services; I shall give only two statistics—*[Interruption.]* These are serious matters; we should forget protocol when there is poverty around. Sheffield can spend £2,864 for each child at risk in 1991-92. How is it that the comparable figure in Liverpool is £3,813 and in Manchester £3,811? Where is the parity in that? We were told that the poll tax would bring about equalisation, but a child at risk in Sheffield is worth £1,000 less than one in Manchester or Liverpool. I am not attacking those cities; I am merely asking for a reasonable deal for Sheffield—the more so in the light of the Secretary of State's remarks about so-called regeneration.

We do not need to wait two years to make a real change in the poll tax. The submissions by Opposition Members should be implemented immediately to mitigate the worst circumstances. As a final suggestion, I propose re-examining credit approvals and European funds, which could have a major effect on the north and on the more deprived areas of the United Kingdom.

8.1 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I welcome the new Ministers in the Scottish Office on the Front Bench, but I hope that they will forgive me if I extend a special welcome to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young). I well remember the time the three of us went into the Ayes Lobby together to support the so-called Mates amendment. We did not win the vote that night——

Mr. Cormack: But we won the argument.

Mr. Riddick: That is right. But the key point about the appointment of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the Department of the Environment is that it shows that the political will now exists in the Government to make the necessary changes to the community charge.

I welcome the link described by the Secretary of State between the review of local government finance and the review of local government structure. We need to examine the arrangements under which local services are provided. Perhaps a certain proportion of councillors should have to stand for election every year, and we should form unitary authorities whenever possible. On a local note, I hope that Kirkles council can be split in two to create a Huddersfield metropolitan district council and a Dewsbury district council.

For any tax to work properly, it must enjoy a measure of public acceptance. One does not need to be a great political sage to recognise that the poll tax does not have the necessary public acceptability. There are two reasons for that. First, the community charge is perceived as unfair because it is flat rate. Secondly, the levels of charge set by local authorities are too high. The first factor is exacerbated by the second.

The Government face three tasks. First, in the short term, we must ensure that there is proper protection for the thousands, if not millions, of ordinary English men and women whose poll tax bills far exceed what they paid in rates. Many of them live in terraced houses whose rateable values were low. Many of them live on comparatively modest incomes but are disqualified from claiming rebate because they have been prudent and saved. Many of them are pensioners whom we have a special responsibility to protect—and many of them live in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South made a similar point and I hope that the Government will give it serious thought.

The transitional relief scheme is the best-suited vehicle to provide short-term protection, but it needs re-examination so that it is no longer linked to standard spending assessments and councils' actual spending. What matters is the level of protection that the Government decide that people need, and which should then be provided.

Secondly, we need to devise a system of local government finance which is sustainable in the long term and will enjoy public acceptance. I agree with the Secretary of State that the one principle of the community charge which is now widely accepted is that everyone should make some contribution to the provision of local government services. We need to tackle the high level of charge being paid by everyone regardless of ability to pay. A flat-rate poll tax would be acceptable if it were £100 or perhaps a maximum of £200. That could be achieved if we stripped out expenditure on education, the police or the fire service —or perhaps all three—from local government spending, although I realise that the cost to the Exchequer would be high.

The sensible approach would be a combination of increased Government support with relating the community charge to people's ability to pay. I know that some of my colleagues have expressed reservations about banding the charge, but it is the most sensible way forward and could be achieved without increasing bureaucracy too much.

On 15 May, I made a speech in an Adjournment debate on this very subject. I put forward a concrete proposal as to how we could band the community charge. Time is short, so I will not go into all the details of how my system would work—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—but I ask my hon. Friends to read my Adjournment debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "We will."] There seems to be a large measure of assent to that proposition.

I know that some of my hon. Friends would complain that we would create a new poverty trap, since a slight increase in income would take a person from one band to

[Mr. Riddick]

the next. That would be a problem, but it pales into insignificance when compared with the current problems of the poll tax and with the different sort of poverty trap that a return to the rates would create. For instance, people living in houses with high rateable values might enjoy only modest incomes. My mind is no more closed than that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I am receptive to any sensible ideas on the subject.

The Government's final task is to ensure that whatever system is finally chosen it is not undermined or abused by Labour local authorities, which have unquestionably used the new system of local government finance to jack up their spending and have then blamed the increase on the new system. Had the rating system still been in use this year, for instance, Labour-controlled Kirklees council would have needed to increase the rates by 35 per cent. to generate the same amount of money as it raised through the community charge this year. Similarly, two months ago the council was talking about a poll tax for next year of £311—an increase of 8 per cent. However, as soon as the capping criteria were announced by the former Secretary of State and, by a quirk of the system, Kirklees could increase its poll tax by significantly more than it had originally thought, the Labour council said that next year's poll tax would be £352—a massive 22 per cent. increase.

I urge the Secretary of State to look again at the charge-capping criteria so that Kirklees, at least, cannot get away with that. The behaviour of Labour councils in hiking the poll tax up to whatever level they think they can get away with is cynical and immoral, and it shows that socialists do not give a damn about the effect that their decisions will have on local people. I hope that my constituents will remember that when the leader of Kirklees council offers himself for election against me in Colne Valley at the next general election.

Mr. Cormack: My hon. Friend will double his majority.

Mr. Riddick: I hope that I will more than double my majority.

In view of the contemptuous way in which Labour councillors have abused the current system, the Government would be entirely justified in acting firmly to keep council spending down over the next few years until the new system of finance is properly bedded in.

After three years of arguing for changes in the community charge system, I am delighted to see that the Government now clearly have the political will to do something to rectify matters and to ensure that the Labour party does not reap the political benefits for which it had hoped. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has proved that the Labour party has nothing serious to offer. I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will deliver a system that is workable, fair and acceptable to the British people.

8.11 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I had intended to scratch my name from the list of speakers in this debate due to my sore throat and bad cold, but having listened to the Secretary of State trying to make bricks without straw I have been tempted to throw my cap into the ring. The new Prime Minister has handed the Secretary of State a poisoned chalice, and it was somewhat disingenuous of the Secretary of State to try to pass it on to the Opposition. We certainly do not intend to pick it up.

Mr. Couchman: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Opposition's tunnel vision is such that they will not pick up an offer from the Secretary of State to discuss the relationship between central and local government? If that is so, it is quite extraordinary.

Mr. Lewis: It was extraordinary for me to give way for such an intervention—I should have had more sense. If the hon. Gentleman is patient, I will tell him why I do not want to take that chance.

We had an amazing offer of dialogue from the new Secretary of State. At the time of the leadership crisis in the Conservative party, it was a toss-up between whether it would be men in grey suits or people in white coats who came to No. 10. However, it was the men in brown trousers from the Tory marginals who persuaded the Government to make today's statement about the poll tax.

The Secretary of State's offer of a partnership with local government was also amazing. I came to the House from local government, and I have watched aghast for the past 11 years while the Government hammered local government into the ground. Local government has suffered an erosion of powers that I would never have envisaged. More than 60 Acts of Parliament have restricted the ability of local government to deliver services for which people have voted and paid. The Secretary of State had the cheek to talk about improving the local government finance, but we have also heard claptrap from Conservative Members about profligate Labour councils.

Mr. Riddick: It is true.

Mr. Lewis: It is not true. I represent two local authorities, Wigan and Salford. From time to time, both are visited by Ministers who laud the councils' partnership deals with Marsham street and the Treasury. This week a Minister visited Wigan and praised it for its partnership deals. Salford quays and Wigan pier have had a procession of Ministers visiting, talking about the wonderful partnerships being entered into and saying how marvellous it is that the councils are embracing the private sector as the Government asked them to do.

There is talk about pragmatic councillors, but the reality is that this year Salford has to find another £8 million worth of cuts, which will hurt the badly off. Some 11 years ago 62 per cent. of local government finance was provided by the Government. The Government have reduced that to about 34 per cent. Starting the process had nothing to do with it. We are talking about cash in the till, and that is down to 34 per cent. A sensible Government would have realised what they were doing and would not have continued the process. They would have realised that greater support was needed. Partnerships are a little too late for some of the people whom I represent.

There has been a madcap rush to cut housing investment. In 11 years, it has been cut by 83 per cent. in Salford and 78 per cent. in Wigan. That shows on the council estates, where houses were sold on the promise that money would be available to improve the remaining rented houses. Time and again, the Government have eroded that promise. That is another reality which faces local government in trying to look after ordinary people.

I shall now explain why I think that the Secretary of State for the Environment is offering us a poisoned chalice. I sent a letter to the right hon. Gentleman when he became the first stalking horse in the leadership campaign, and I sent the same letter to the right hon. Member who is now Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who was also a contender. I congratulated them on having the scales fall from their eyes and finding that the poll tax was indeed a bad tax which militated against ordinary people. I made five points in the letter, and said that if they were serious about changes and accepted that it was a bad tax which had damaged poor people, they would accept those five precepts.

I probably paid my poll tax quicker than I ever paid my rates because I knew that money would be slow in coming to the local authorities, although not because people were protesting by not paying, as such people are few. The greater proportion of those who have not paid the poll tax cannot pay it because they do not have the means to pay even the 20 per cent. None of the three right hon. Members replied to my letter—not that I expected them to do so although, as usual, I was trying to be helpful.

Mr. Dewar: They are refusing consultation.

Mr. Lewis: That is right—they always refuse to consult.

I said in my letter that any retrospective changes had to address the problems of non-payment for those without the means to pay. The second point asked them to take steps, exceptionally, to ensure that the franchise is restored with immediate effect to those who are unable to pay and who have sought avoidance by voter non-registration. The Government have also given the vote to 1 million people in South Africa, but that is beside the point.

I also argued that those who genuinely could not pay should be compensated for incurring court or bailiff costs. If it is a bad tax now, it was a bad tax when it was introduced and it has been a bad tax while it has been in operation.

I called for the removal of the stigma of having court judgments against people who do not have the means to pay the tax. In particular, I was thinking of the elderly. Many elderly people in my constituency have been driven into debt for the first time in their lives by this cruel legislation.

I also called for the non-collection element of poll tax bills to be funded from central sources for 1988-89 in Scotland, and for the rest of the United Kingdom this year. The Government must recognise that those precepts should be accepted because people have been hurt badly as a result of the madcap introduction of the poll tax.

It ill behoves Conservative Members to say that it will be two years before a fundamental review can reach a conclusion. The poll tax legislation was introduced on the back of an envelope at the speed of light. It even caught Conservative Back Benchers on the hop. The poll tax is another of the former Prime Minister's prejudices to be translated into legislation, and it will require an extra payment from Conservative Members.

If Conservative Members doubt how many people are suffering, have suffered and will continue to suffer through the imposition of the poll tax, let me do a commercial for a document entitled, "The Impact of Poll Tax", which was produced by Church Action on Poverty. The report shows the depths into which poor people have been driven as a result of the imposition of the poll tax, and that organisation would be happy to assist in the Government's proposed dialogue.

I have given the reasons why I suspect that the new Secretary of State is offering an olive branch which is in fact a poisoned chalice. The Government must solve their own problems. If Conservative Members reflect carefully, they will realise that it is those who have most to lose electorally who are making the most noise now. We should not be blinded by that. We have said from the start that the tax is bad and that it militates against the poorest. We would never have introduced it and we should not be expected to pull the Government out of trouble now.

8.22 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) and to question again his extraordinary rejection of the most sensible offer made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for wide-ranging talks and consideration and review of the relationship between local and central Government. I regret that so much enmity between local and central Government has built up over the years partly through the actions of some irresponsible councils and partly as a result of a lack of trust, perhaps on central Government's part, of the motives of local government.

It is particularly important that the review and attempt to rebuild the bridges should come at this time for the care in the community policy in which I take a considerable interest as a former chairman of a health authority and of a social services committee. I welcome my right hon. Friend's promise of wide-ranging talks and to rebuild the relationship.

The Opposition's motion was moved by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in what must have been the most threadbare speech from the Opposition Front Bench to which we have been treated for a very long time.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it was the most threadbare speech since the speech made by the Leader of the Opposition only a few days ago?

Mr. Couchman: I would not like to be a judge in that competition.

Labour's 65th policy on local government finance——

Mr. Harry Barnes: That sounds like the brief of the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey).

Mr. Couchman: I do not have a brief and I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman one. I do not have a copy of the brief belonging to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey).

Labour's 65th policy on local government finance could also be referred to as Labour's big bribe. Under a reversion to the rates as they were in 1989, some 18 million people would be relieved of the necessity to pay towards local government finance. That was the great weakness of the rates as a way of funding local government. No doubt there will be some enticement to those 18 million people who may be tempted to vote for Labour at the next general election in the hope that they will not have to contribute to local government.

However, I understand that that policy is linked to some ill-defined form of ability to pay. I spoke to an

[Mr. Couchman]

Opposition friend of mine in the Corridor and he suggested that that meant a local income tax. I thought about that, because we have already talked about such a tax. When the community charge replaced rates, it was estimated that, if we had opted for a local income tax in the boroughs of Camden and Islington people would have had to pay up to £6,000 a year. I do not fancy making a tax return to the Inland Revenue, but to have to make one to the town hall, of which there are 400, is even less appealing.

If registration for the community charge was difficult, getting people to make an income tax return to the town hall would be impossible. No doubt those who were not householders and did not fill in their local income tax return would pay nothing. Avoidance would become genetic among non-householders who did not want to pay their contribution to local government finance.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The hon. Gentleman seems to be under the misconception that the Labour party is in favour of a local income tax. Our policy is simple: we will go back to the rates.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman has revealed far more than the hon. Member for Dagenham was prepared to reveal in his threadbare offering earlier. If there is a return to the rates, 18 million people will be enticed to vote Labour because they will want to pay nothing towards local government finance. That is one of the shoddiest bribes to be offered by the Labour party in a long time. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). I am sure that not only *Hansard* but the press will have recorded his comments and his promise.

Let us pursue the responsible view that has apparently been offered from the Opposition Front Bench that there will be some form of local income tax. Who will collect it? I am a small employer. Do not look to me to collect the tax. People who work for me do not necessarily live where I run my business. I do not want to collect for their boroughs. The situation would be impossible, and I suspect that the local income tax would be rejected very quickly as it was rejected by Layfield.

The greatest weakness of the community charge is its collectability. As an employer in the hotel and catering trade, I know how uncollectable it is. My staff come and go. If they register, they forget to deregister. They certainly never get bills because they move on so quickly. I have some sneaking sympathy, therefore, with the Opposition for having decided that they would revert to the rating system. Rates were easily collectable, but the great weakness of the system was the unfairness with which it treated people who lived in like accommodation and who had unlike incomes. We have all heard of the little old lady living in one half of a pair of semi-detached houses who paid the same rates as the four wage earners who lived next door. That is a problem that would have to be overcome. That would be possible by reverting to domestic rates and introducing a capitation factor, an idea that we rejected out of hand, and too easily.

We could revert rapidly to the rating system, and perhaps more quickly than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was prepared to accept, by using the 1989 rating bills and introducing a capitation factor that was based on either the electoral roll or the community charge register. I personally favour a hybrid rating scheme. It would be easier to collect than the poll tax and responsibility for paying it would lie with the householder, who would have to pay whatever capitation formula was introduced. Such a scheme could be introduced quickly and simply. I suspect that the necessary legislation would not be complicated.

If we are not to see a wholesale reform of the community charge, or even a return to the rating system as a method of raising local government finance, one of the greatest unfairnesses of the present system is the imposition of a standard community charge at double the personal rate when someone dies. The double imposition falls upon his or her beneficiaries for whatever time it takes to sell the property.

With the present stagnant property market, I have had to deal with an especially difficult constituency matter. One of my constituents is having to pay a bill of nearly £500 for a small unoccupied flat in Thanet because the local financial and central services director has taken the view which is set out in a letter, part of which I shall quote:

> "On reading the letter from your local MP . . . I am surprised at his comment that, and I quote, 'the Government certainly never intended that any Council should levy a standard community charge of twice the personal community charge in these circumstances.' If that is the case then why I wonder was legislation not amended on its passage through Parliament. Surely the Members of Parliament are not that unaware that they did not expect Charging Authorities to exercise their discretionary powers to the maximum allowed to the benefit of local chargepayers as a whole."

That is one of the most disgraceful things that I have ever read in a letter written by a local government officer. If local government officers have advised their councils to impose a double personal charge as a standard charge where someone has died and the property has yet to be sold, I must look to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to put that right post haste.

We must get out of the trap of a flat rate charge. I have expressed my thoughts, and I am sure that others will offer theirs, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. With the distillation of those thoughts, I hope that he will be able to offer us a sensible way forward. I also hope that the Opposition will accept his offer of all-party talks on how we should rebuild the relationship between central Government and local government.

8.34 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There has been only one speech of substance by a Conservative Member this evening, and that was the one delivered by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee). It is a pity that his speech was not the speech of the Secretary of State for the Environment. If it had been, it would have opened up possibilities for the discussions that the right hon. Gentleman has talked about. The hon. Gentleman said that a property tax would be a better form of taxation than the poll tax and he suggested that it should be linked and related to the ability to pay. That would mean that the Labour party's rebate scheme would be attached to the property tax that it proposes.

The hon. Gentleman has advocated the agenda that the Labour party has put forward. He had some ideas on how to handle the short-term emergency problem with which we would be confronted before we abolished the poll tax.

I do not think that what he suggested would necessarily work smoothly, but at least he offered ideas that could be discussed and considered.

Apart from the hon. Member for Pendle, Conservative Members have either defended the poll tax, subject to minor adjustments, or have talked in vague and woolly terms about a review and everything being open for discussion. They have repeated the language of the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State said that he wanted talks. If so, why did he attack the very people with whom he would have them? He is supposed to want talks with the representatives of local government, but his language was the traditional approach of those who supported the introduction of the poll tax all along. He spoke of profligate authorities and claimed that high poll tax charges were the fault of the Labour-controlled local authorities rather than the grant system and the standard spending assessment that the Government have implemented. His language was distorted. He attacked also the Opposition, and not only because of the furore that arose in the Chamber. The attack had been prepared and was in his speech. He said that he was seeking negotiations and then he attacked the very people with whom he wished to negotiate. It was rather like the Americans saying that they wanted to enter into negotiations with Saddam Hussein and claiming that they could force him into accepting negotiations.

The Government have a majority of 100 Members in this place, and there should be discussions and negotiations among Conservative Members before any all-party talks take place. The Government should come forward with ideas. They cannot merely say, "Everything is open and we shall discuss everything." They must say, "These are our ideas. These are the thoughts that we shall throw into the talks. We might be willing to adjust them or alter them, and we may even accept fundamental reform."

How many ideas did the Secretary of State present this afternoon? The answer is none. It seems that he wishes to talk again about the poll tax or to introduce what the *Evening Standard* describes as a new poll tax because of the problems that have arisen with the public. It seems that the poll tax must be reconsidered, because it has proved to be unpopular. The right hon. Gentleman did not say why he thought that it has proved unpopular and why there are problems with it. He did not suggest why the public have reacted so strongly against it. He seemed to be saying that the opinion polls show that the public are strongly opposed to it, that all the signs are that the public are against it and that we had better reconsider it. What sort of position is that when it comes to negotiations?

What are the basic problems with the poll tax? The major defect is the one that was raised by the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). He said that there should be no representation without taxation. That is what is wrong with the poll tax. The notion of accountability that accompanies the poll tax is wrong. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) said that everyone should contribute something towards local services if he or she is to be entitled to a vote.

The very concept that led Conservatives to go forward with the poll tax is the thing that is wrong with it. It means that the entitlement to vote is based upon taxation, and that is not the way to run a democratic society. People should have a birthright to exercise the franchise, and only at a later stage should it be decided what people should pay. The franchise would never have been advanced on the basis of poll tax. In the 19th century, the franchise was based on a property qualification, and only certain people were entitled to it.

Some people are being excluded. Records show that there is a shortfall of 600,000 on the electoral registers for England, Scotland and Wales. That has not happened in Northern Ireland. What is the difference between Northern Ireland and England, Scotland and Wales? It is that Northern Ireland does not have the poll tax, and its franchise is therefore in a much healthier state. That should worry all hon. Members.

During Question Time, the hon. Member for Colne Valley suggested that the franchise should be taken away from those who did not pay their poll tax. He should be ashamed of making such a suggestion in the House. We are all beneficiaries of the democratic process.

Mr. Riddick: Will the hon. Gentleman come clean and tell us the real reason why he opposes the poll tax? He gave an explanation in some rag called "Seven Days" in August 1988. He wrote:

> "People paying a high poll tax—especially in inner city areas—will feel punished by having a Labour council. People will then ask: why should I pay so much money so that the council can help drug addicts and fund lesbian and gay activities? . . . Long term, I am doubtful that what is left of local government can remain a useful site for our electoral struggle."

Why does not the hon. Gentleman tell us the real reason why he opposes the poll tax? It is because he knows that the party is over.

Mr. Barnes: If councillors do not want to levy over-high levels of poll tax, they have to cut services. If they want to provide services, they have to charge astronomical levels of poll tax. That is not a choice that Parliament should place upon local councillors, because it is no choice. Whichever they choose, it hammers local people. It is a fix and a fiddle. The hon. Member for Colne Valley must show me the article that he quoted, because I do not recognise it. Perhaps he is not aware of who I am. However, it may be that, having studied it closely, I would not find too much with which to disagree.

The main problem with the poll tax is not just that it is a tax per head, but that it has consequences for electoral registers and polling. Another problem is that its level has been pushed up and up by Government actions to cut rate support grant in recent years. It would have been bad enough if there had just been a standard, low-level poll tax to be paid by most people, but it is even worse than that, because Government actions have foisted high levels upon us.

My reason for not paying my poll tax relates to the point that I made about electoral registration. I was elected by the people of my constituency, and a large number of them have been forced off the register. Indeed, 8·5 per cent. of the electorate even in Finchley have disappeared from the register during the past two years. That has led to a distorted electorate. It would have been bad enough if those who have been forced off the registers had been chosen at random, across the political spectrum, but the reality is even worse—people from specific sets of political views are being hammered. They have the most to fear from the continuation of the poll tax, because they have been forced off the franchise and therefore have no opportunity to vote for changes.

[Mr. Barnes]

I intend to argue in the courts that the Government have undermined the operation of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and that, de facto, many, many people are being excluded from the franchise. The law must recognise that as undermining the Act. It is disgraceful that a modern-day Government should introduce a measure that undermines the Act. It is the worse form of taxation ever introduced into any western democratic system. That is why people are rebelling against it. No other Government in western Europe or in the developing democracies of eastern Europe—or, indeed, anywhere else in the world—would introduce a poll tax.

The only way forward is to state clearly that the poll tax will be abolished. We do not want a new poll tax, a graduated poll tax, or a poll tax with changes here and there. We want an entirely different system, and the easiest way to achieve that is to revert to the rating system. We need to move quickly, and that would allow us to do so. A review that goes on and on, with people discussing different ideas, will only make matters worse. The poll tax must be abolished, and if the Secretary of State can offer some ideas about that, we might then begin a dialogue. Members of the Conservative party, which has a vast majority, should get together and find an alternative to the poll tax.

8.46 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I welcome the return of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the Front Bench. I know how much he believes in what he called the integrated approach—the structure of local government, the relationship between it and central Government, the relationship of both with the community, together with the financing of local government. Unless we consider all as a whole, we will continue to make grave errors.

I wish to deal with three issues. The first is the aspect of fairness mentioned by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). My right hon. Friend has stressed many times that he places great weight on the public's perception of a lack of fairness in the community charge. I wrote an article in *The Times* almost three years ago and received a lot of flak about it. I calculated that well under 20 per cent. of the electorate in my constituency would benefit by more than £50. That calculation was based on a Government poll tax figure of £178 per person. Therein lies one of the problems. Leeds ended up with a poll tax of £345 per person—and, under the current Labour council, we are heading for £400 or more. It does the Government no good to pitch expectations at one level if the reality turns out to be very different. It simply heightens the sense of injustice.

I accept that there is an attractive principle in the poll tax, which is that it is a tax per head: everybody makes some contribution to the cost of local government. Huge costs were involved in creating the registers and if the system is to continue to be used, one suggestion is to apply it in broad bands related to income. I do not envisage any real difficulties, except that a poverty trap would be created at the bottom of the banding. It would not be a problem at the top because doubling the rate for someone moving into the top tax band, which might mean paying an additional £200 a year, would not really be a disincentive. But to move from a 20 per cent. rate to a full rate in a rough and ready banding system—there could not be too many bands or it would be a local income tax—would create disincentives. Therefore, there are some difficulties.

I never accepted that passing information from the Inland Revenue to local councils was a problem in principle. The poor have to give every bit of information about their earnings in order to claim benefit. But better would be a system of self-assessment whereby people ticked a box saying whether they were a top taxpayer or paid no tax. There could be an ad hoc checking of that system, but, by and large, if such a system were adopted, people could be trusted.

An alternative would be to keep the poll tax and relate it broadly—I stress broadly—to property. No revaluation imposes a huge cost and, despite all the best efforts of the experts, it is always pretty rough and ready. People are aggrieved by differentials. They do not see why properties in the same street should have different rateable values. Any revaluation system can be perfect, so why not accept a rough and ready system of broad bands?

In Leeds there are essentially five bands. In band A there would be odd houses such as Harewood house, with rateable values under the old system of more than £2,000. In band B, would be the housing in the suburbs with rateable values of between £400 and £1,000. The next two bands could contain the largest number of properties, those with rateable values under £400 and under £200—band D—and lastly there would be a band containing the smaller older properties, of which there are many in Leeds with rateable values of less than £50.

The average rateable value under the old system in Leeds, was £150, so most people would fall into band D. Any subsequent revaluation could be done by a local authority altering the bands, when judged necessary. Each authority could make its own judgment. People would well understand why in one part of a town people were in band B, whereas elsewhere they came in bands D and E. The bands would affect the rate at which one paid the poll tax. That would give a certain perception of fairness.

Whether we move to a property-based system or simply retain a per capita system, the burden falling on individuals at local authority level is too high. When, more than 10 years ago, I was in the Department of the Environment and we looked at all the options, it was obvious to me that, if we were to reform the rating system, the scale of local authority expenditure had to be reduced.

The dominant expenditure falling on local authorities is education. I have always argued that, as education is a national investment, and as there are national standards which it is critical should be provided for our people, central Government should finance education directly and not assume that the whims, prejudices and philosophies of local councils will be the same as those of the Government. Clearly, often they are not. It was only last year that Leeds accepted the technical and vocational education initiative, one of the most important vocational developments. It was almost the last education authority in the land to do so, simply because, for some reason, it thought that it was the tainted priority of a Conservative Government requiring tainted Conservative money.

Let me refer to the excellent pedigree of the scheme put forward by Lord Joseph, as he now is, in 1982 for a 75 per cent. central grant earmarked for education. We could go beyond the first stage—of allowing local authorities to

disburse it—reinforcing the current direction of Government policy, which is that schools should themselves have a greater say over their budgets and what they want to do. In other words, we are talking not just of the relationship between central and local government but about the relationship generally of services to the community.

The cost of schools could be funded directly using the formula that has been established under the local management of schools. The governors and head of a school could then decide how much to spend on teachers as against equipment. Instead of all teachers' salaries being paid from the centre, there would be more devolution of negotiations on teachers' pay and how many teachers should be employed.

The Government's intention of the grant maintained status of schools was, according to the circular, to

"leave the balance of support for education between national and local tax payers unchanged."

In other words, although we try to encourage schools to opt out from the local authority system, the local authority still pays. That point is often overlooked. The money is recouped from the local education authorities. That is a wasteful procedure anyway and it does not redirect costs from the local authority to the centre. It lifts no burden from the community charge payer. If we were to move to direct payment from the Treasury to the schools so that the schools, governors and parents could assess priorities themselves, existing policies would be reinforced and that would have important consequences.

An education block grant covering all education in the region of just under 3p would fall on income tax. I do not know where the local government correspondent of *The Times* got his figure of 10p from. However, it could be done in phases and involve no tax increase. At the same time, we could do something with the police block grant, which is currently 51 per cent. The Metropolitan police grant has just been increased to 52 per cent. There are powers in the police Acts to enable the Secretary of State to change the amount of grant. The police could immediately go up to 75 per cent., which would save another £1 billion to the benefit of the community charge. I would not include the fire service. That is a local, not a national, service. However, police and education are national services which could be moved towards a 75 or 80 per cent. block grant, thereby lifting enough of the community charge to halve it.

A package of different approaches could be put together which would have the effect of lowering the burden on charge payers and it could be phased in. There is no reason to hesitate. It would be possible to use existing powers under the education support grant system, because, with effect from last April, there is no ceiling to the amount that can be channelled directly from the Department of Education and Science to education. One could start the process of transferring education costs to the centre, together with police costs, before next April. If one wanted to do something about the fairness of charges, the old rateable values are still in existence because the water authorities use them. So one could equally do something about broad property banding before next April.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State urgently to consider how to move forward in a number of directions, not just as part of the long-term restructuring of local government, including provision for elected mayors, of which I approve, but so that a new system can be implemented before next year.

8.58 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): There will be great disappointment among my constituents tonight, because they were looking forward to hearing the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) say that he intended to scrap the poll tax. That is the action that the right hon. Gentleman implied that he would take when he stood for the leadership of the Conservative party. One has the feeling that he was given the post that he now holds as a form of punishment.

Seventy-nine per cent. of my constituents are worse off with the poll tax than under the old rating system, which accounts for my advocacy of a return to the old arrangement. It is not only the Secretary of State for the Environment who does not appear to have a clue about what he should do; the same is true of Tory Members in general. I suspect that there are no members of the No Turning Back group in their places.

Mr. John Marshall: Who says?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The hon. Gentleman is wrong again.

Mr. Martlew: If Government Members do not turn back, they will be heading for political oblivion—*[Interruption.]* If any member of the No Turning Back group wants me to give way, I shall be happy to do so.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman is not worth it.

Mr. Martlew: Immediately the new Prime Minister took office, I wrote to him suggesting that he put a Bill before the House to repeal the community charge—to give it the Conservative title, but really the poll tax, to give its true name—and to reintroduce the old rating system from 1 April 1991. The House would ensure that such legislation had a speedy passage through Parliament. There would be no objections to it from Labour Members, and I am sure that Conservative Members too would agree to it, knowing that the Government had made a mistake.

Instead, we are told that the poll tax might be reformed after the next general election. I warn the electorate not to believe the Conservatives. If they are re-elected, the poll tax would have a very low priority, and it could be towards the end of another Conservative term of office before they decided to change the system. The Prime Minister has kept silent, and the Secretary of State for the Environment asked Labour to help him out of a mess. It reminds me of the old Laurel and Hardy phrase, "This is another fine mess you've gotten us into." We are expected to help out the Conservatives and to save their political skins.

We want a return to the old rating system and a fairer rebate scheme. Conservative Members have long denigrated the old rating system, but problems with it arose only when a Conservative Government decided to reduce rate support grant. The electorate saw rates shooting up but services reducing. That happened because the Tories cut rate support grant and gave the money back in the form of personal tax cuts. It is a myth that people who did not pay rates contributed nothing to local government services. Anyone who pays income tax pays for local government services, and the Government know that to be true. The Tories wanted to be seen to be

[Mr. Martlew]

reducing income tax, but blamed local authorities for rate increases. They did that even to the extent of criticising Tory-controlled councils. That did not bother Conservative Members of Parliament.

People live in the houses that they can afford because of the tax incentives that they enjoy—in the form of the £30,000 mortgage interest relief limit, and the absence of capital gains tax when they sell their properties. However, we must take account also of the little old lady who lives in a house that she cannot afford to run. There are also many people who calculated that they could afford a particular level of mortgage and rates but who now find that they can afford neither because of high interest rates and the poll tax respectively.

The House should pass a Bill before 1 April 1991 that gets rid of the poll tax and re-establishes the old rating system.

9.4 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I have detected a certain amount of gloating among Opposition Members over the possibility that the Government might have to change their policy, but I do not think that the Opposition have any right to gloat. How can they criticise us for supposedly not listening and them blame us when we listen and propose to make changes? I am also not sure what right the Opposition have to criticise us for possibly changing policy when they have gone through a series of dizzying and sickening policy gyrations of their own in the past few years. Two years ago they were telling us that nuclear weapons were immoral and evil, yet a nuclear deterrent is now part of their policy. They should remember that fact before they start to criticise us for changing our policies.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines."

There is no shame in the Government making changes, or developing their policies. The difference between us and the Opposition is that we remain true to our basic principles, but are prepared to change when necessary, compared with the Opposition who are ready to throw off all their most heartfelt principles in an opportunistic attempt to win power—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may laugh, but they know that virtually every policy on which they fought the general elections of 1983 and 1987 is now in the rubbish bin.

I accept that the Government made some mistakes in implementing the community charge, allowing irresponsible and profligate local authorities to increase their spending massively in the hope that the blame would rest with the Government. The first mistake we made was that the safety net blurred the distinction between careful and profligate local authorities. The second mistake was to introduce the community charge in the year after the county council elections. Everyone knows that local authorities keep their spending low in county council election year, and spend up with a vengeance the year after, and that is exactly what they did this year—with the result that the community charge was far higher than it needed to be.

The Government should have frozen spending increases by local authorities in the first year of the community charge to no more than the rate of inflation. In that way, the community charge would have been introduced at a rate of more like £250, which would have been far more acceptable to the majority of people, bearing in mind that it is the level of the charge, rather than the principle, which is disliked by many people.

Whatever mistakes the Government have made, poor coverage by the media compounded the problems. For months at the beginning of the year there was no coverage of waste and profligacy by many Labour councils. My hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) know that I could go into great detail about profligate expenditure by Derbyshire county council—how it wastes millions of pounds on a bloated publicity department, the huge sums of money that it spent on a millionaires' playground in the Soviet Union, and how it increased staff, especially office staff, by more than any other county council.

I could go into detail about the report issued today by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, which gives a damning indictment of bureaucracy and waste by the Derbyshire county council police committee. I could go into detail, but if I ran through all the wasteful spending by Derbyshire county council, I should overrun my time and I do not want to do that.

Mr. Harry Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Oppenheim: No. Normally I would give way to the hon. Gentleman, as it is always a pleasure to hear what he has to say, but he has spoken already in the debate and he knows that we only have a short time.

Nothing epitomises waste in local government so much as the sterile and ludicrous debates about the contracting out of services. It is daft that we should debate contracting out. Local government should contract out services when private contractors would do the job best, and should keep services in house when an in-house team can do the work best. Labour local authorities do not accept that—they have to keep everything in house, regardless of value for money and performance.

It is interesting to note that, in France, even socialist and communist local councils accept the principle of contracting out, yet in England, Derbyshire county council rejected one low tender because it arrived in an envelope of the wrong colour. Keeping in with its NUPE paymasters is far more important to that council than providing good services at a reasonable cost.

Too many local councils in recent years have lost sight of the basic fact that they are there to provide reasonable services at a good cost. Instead, they concentrate on empire building and playing politics, and their profligacy has been cheered on in a disgraceful and irresponsible way by Opposition Members. Whatever system is implemented over the next few years, whichever party is in government, they will have to face the fact that local government cannot continue to increase its spending as it has done without causing grave economic problems to the country.

And I remind Opposition Members that, when they were last in power, they faced the problems of high local government spending. It was their Prime Minister who said that the "party had to end", and their Government who ended the principle of a standard automatic percentage of local government spending coming from central Government.

Whatever the problems caused by the high spending of local government, I accept that the present Administration have made some mistakes in their implementation of the community charge arrangements. I believe that, over the summer, our former Prime Minister was badly advised and did not realise the extent of the damage done by the botched introduction of the community charge. It is ironic that some of her most loyal supporters were guilty of giving her that bad advice.

That does not mean, however, that the Opposition have anything to be smug about. Labour's policy of returning to the rating system shows the bankruptcy of its thinking. Labour is content to criticise the Government without being in the least constructive itself. Having produced review after review, the party has come up with little more than a return to the rates—which would mean a return to the days when half of the electorate was able to vote without having to bear any of the burden of local authority spending.

We now need to consider the possibility of increasing rebates to help the most needy. I believe that the rebate system is the best way of targeting any help. There is no doubt that the poor need more protection from the profligate spending of Labour authorities such as Derbyshire county council.

If, in future, it is decided to change the system, the principle that everyone should contribute could probably be incorporated in a capital-values property tax. That could involve one-person households having to pay on only half the capital value of their homes, with households consisting of more than two people paying an extra 25 per cent. for each extra adult. Everyone would have to pay a minimum of 25 per cent. of the average charge. I also consider it crucial for us to increase the accountability of local government by moving to a system of unitary authorities through the abolition of county councils.

Whatever happens, however, the principle of everyone having to make a contribution must be retained. If one good thing has come out of the community charge, it is the now wide acceptance of that principle. We should remember De Tocqueville's warning in "Democracy in America":

> "Countries where lawmaking falls exclusively to the lot of the poor cannot hope for much economy in public expenditure; expenses will always be considerable, either because taxes cannot touch those who vote for them or because they are assessed in a way to prevent that."

9.13 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): First, let me congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton)—as many others have done—on a very dignified and effective maiden speech. He spoke with a good deal of feeling, and some justifiable anger, about the impact of the poll tax on the area that he represents. I know that he will prove an extremely worthy and welcome representative of that area.

One recent event—the arrival of a new Secretary of State for Scotland—will probably have slightly more of an impact on my life than it will on those of some other hon. Members, but it is none the less not without interest. I note that the new Secretary of State for Scotland has been quoted in the press as speaking about compassion and idealism, not ideology. At one point, he referred to dialogue, not discord. I expected to see photographs of him standing on the steps of St. Andrews house, ready with a handy quotation from St. Francis of Assisi. His good intentions are to be welcomed, but one of the crucial tests against which his intentions will be judged is what emerges from the great poll tax debate within Government.

We live in heady and stirring times. In every corner of Westminster, Tories can be seen gathering to declare their dislike of the poll tax. On every side, the cry, familiar to all Scots, is heard: "It wasna' me." Up to now, the Scottish Office has shown no sign of conscience or remorse. A wealth of proposals have been put forward, some ill defined. Half-promises have been made. Policy formation depends on myths and prophecy. Shell-shocked Back Benchers have returned from the battlefronts of the by-elections desperate to see the back of the poll tax.

I give credit to the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) for his attempted coup. He himself, unfortunately, died in the rubble, but for all that it was a brave attempt, and it opened the floodgates. I listened with considerable interest to his speech. At one moment, he spoke, for reasons that were not clear to me, about the greatest moments in British history. I do not believe that the present shambles in the Conservative party is likely to be seen in that light. There was, however, little hard news in his speech, so the odd phrase helped.

Briefly stated, the newsline was that there is to be a thorough, constructive and fundamental review of the poll tax, although no one is clear exactly what that means. Then we had a very speculative offer—one so ill defined and vague as to have attracted the attention of the Office of Fair Trading if it had been made in the world of commerce. It was what the right hon. Gentleman was pleased to call "constructive dialogue".

In an intervention, I tried to tempt the right hon. Gentleman to say a little more about it, but I had remarkably little success. I hope that we shall hear more about it from the Secretary of State for Scotland. We know that a working party has been formed. I am not sure whether the constructive dialogue is to be within the working party. It was suggested that Opposition parties should join it, although I guess that that will not happen. I understood the right hon. Gentleman to say that the constructive dialogue is more likely to be in the form of inter-party talks, but the composition, the standing of the inter-party talks in terms of policy formation, the framework within which they will be held and the agenda were left remarkably vague. I was not impressed.

I am not anything like so battle-scarred a veteran as the right hon. Gentleman in the ways of this House—and certainly not so battle-scarred in the ways of government—but my brief experience leads me to believe that, if any serious attempt is made to set up a dialogue across the party divide, feelers are put out and private discussions take place in advance. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not resent it when I say that, when such offers are made in that way, as a sort of political white rabbit out of a hat, I doubt the sincerity of the offer and of the man who makes the offer. It is so ill structured and so lacking in shape and form that the right hon. Gentleman might just as usefully have proposed putting a suggestions box outside Tory party headquarters.

Despite all the other issues that were included in his Tory party leadership manifesto by the right hon. Member for Henley—almost everything, but not the kitchen sink—the one thing that was not included was the suggestion that we should proceed with poll tax reform by

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

consensus, with decision making being taken, at least in part, by Opposition parties. I suspect that it was not included in his manifesto because it did not occur to him at the time. If the right hon. Gentleman had made such a suggestion, it would have been greeted with ridicule and dismay by those who voted for him.

We listened today to a Minister bereft of ideas. Like the Prime Minister, he does know what to do about the poll tax. We must remember that the Prime Minister is on record as saying that no one else does, either. Having decided that he does not know what to do about the poll tax, the Secretary of State for the Environment has concluded that the best thing to do is to ask someone else to supply a few ideas.

We are delighted to do that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have a well-defined document already on offer. *[Interruption.]* I listened to many Conservative Members say that they do not like the specifics or that they do not like the theory or practicalities of it. However, they cannot say that it cannot be debated or discussed if they insist on attacking it so violently. It is there and it is a suggestion.

It is a good deal more specific than what we had from the Secretary of State today. He suggested that there were some ideas in the middle ground, some of which might be introduced quickly and some of which might not. One outstanding feature of his speech was that he did not give a single clue about what any one of those suggestions might be. It was a vacant and empty performance, full of style but with no content.

I am not satisfied. If the Secretary of State is prepared to work out an agenda and have as a starting point the fact that the poll tax will not survive the review, we may be in business and we may be able to consider what he is saying. However, I have no intention of advising my hon. Friends to accept what is no more than a political pig in a poke, a presentational device of little worth and little real value, and presented with little sincerity.

I want to ask about the Scottish Office's position, because the Secretary of State for Scotland is with us. I know a good deal about the Scottish Office's record. No one would doubt the determined loyalty of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is now in charge of the poll tax in the Scottish Office. He has been, over the years, an unashamed signatory of No Turning Back tracts.

No one would doubt the loyalty to the poll tax of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who will keep the lost leader's cause alive long after she has gone. The hon. Member for Stirling will be pleased to know that I do not normally look upon him with a romantic eye, but in this matter he is likely to be the last of the political Jacobites, drinking toasts to his departed heroine when she is but a footnote in the history books.

The Secretary of State is of more interest. He is not a man given to the flashing phrase. In fact, he is not a phrase maker at all. However, on the poll tax he is a proven cold warrior. He has defended the indefensible at every turn. He has been the man put up to deny that any problem exists or that any radical rethinking is necessary. He never flinches from the task. If a hard heart is to be shown, whether it is to students, the disabled or those suffering from Alzheimer's disease, the Secretary of State is there to do his duty. If the evident chaos of the system has to be denied, he is there to enunciate the Government's point of view. He has told us many times that his system is "working well" and is a "remarkable success story". Even he must feel a little embarrassed about his position at this moment.

On 17 November, when the present Secretary of State for the Environment was in Scotland threatening death and destruction to the poll tax, the present Secretary of State for Scotland was blaming the local authorities, proclaiming, "Not a penny more," and talking of "minor changes" and a system that was

"in essence here to stay."

If that is an example of the flexibility of the Scottish Office in the present crisis, the Secretary of State for Scotland will understand why I and my hon. Friends are sceptical about the offer produced unexpectedly today by his colleague, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Secretary of State for Scotland's record is not one to warm the cockles of the heart as Christmas approaches. Before we go any further, we should have from the Government some respectable effort, not perhaps in detail but at least in outline, to define their position. No attempt has been made today by Front-Bench Members. There have been honest attempts by some Back-Bench Members who have different views, but it is totally unsatisfactory that we have had nothing from the Government Front Bench.

Does the Secretary of State for Scotland want a fundamental review? Is he prepared to consider total abolition, or is the review simply a cosmetic cover that will allow the faults of the poll tax somehow to survive, despite their unpopularity? Would the Secretary of State for Scotland switch education spending from local government to the Exchequer? Perhaps, like me, he is rather doubtful about that.

From the campaign speeches of the Secretary of State for the Environment, it looks as though—to use a metaphor from earlier in the debate—he has discovered the philosopher's stone. I am extremely interested in the fiscal conjuring trick that would allow that massive switch to the Exchequer with no increase in income tax and an increase in public expenditure. It is a remarkable triumph of hope over experience. I hate to think of the sarcasm and contempt that the right hon. Gentleman would have heaped on our heads had we produced a fiscal formula of that kind. At least we know one thing: the Secretary of State for the Environment will never again be able to attack us for our spending plans, given his own fraudulent prospectus.

The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir. R. Boyson)—who I always find an endearing figure in his own quaint way—had a solution. He likened the Chancellor of the Exchequer to a squirrel, and I see his point; the right hon. Gentleman does look a little like a squirrel. He suggested that the squirrel should bring out its nuts. A good deal of that went on on the Conservative Benches during the debate.

The strength of the argument for the switch was diminished by the article in *The Times* of 10 May, in which the Secretary of State contradicted himself and undermined his argument so thoroughly. That was not the only expression of doubt. In April 1988, a splendid speech by the Secretary of State appeared in *Hansard*. I should not have known about it had it not been kindly brought to my attention by the hon. Member for Stirling, who wrote

about it to his constituency chairman—a tactic with which the Secretary of State may be familiar. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman received a reply.

The hon. Gentleman recorded the remarkable statement made by the Secretary of State for the Environment in April 1988, in which he completely demolished the idea, which he was then advocating in the public prints, of a switch of education expenditure. To his surprised constituency chairman, the hon. Gentleman belaboured the Secretary of State and explained that that was why he would certainly not vote for him. As far as one can gather, the general drift of the hon. Gentleman's remarks was that the right hon. Gentleman was an intellectual shambles, although I do not want to pry further into that private grief.

We want to know a bit more about the options. Perhaps the Secretary of State for Scotland will tell us whether he is in favour of a referendum every time a council's spending exceeds a certain limit. Perhaps he will tell us whether he is in favour of banding, which he has condemned so strongly in the past, or whether he is even prepared to consider it.

One fact that emerges from the confusion in this debate is that the Labour party alone has a coherent defined policy. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members may disagree with it, but it is there. Let us look at some of the other parties—for example, the Scottish National party, which is also in an embarrassing position. I accept entirely that many of the nationalists feel very strongly and passionately about the effectiveness of the non-payment campaign and espouse it most sincerely. They must be dismayed by the fact that their leader, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has said publicly in the prints that the banding of the poll tax would be equivalent to the abolition of the poll tax and that the SNP would then call off its campaign of resistance.

Let me quote from *The Guardian* of 28 November:

"Yesterday Alex Salmond, the new SNP leader, climbed on the back of the Heseltine-Major-Hurd poll tax review"—

that must have been extremely uncomfortable for him—

"to argue that, once the charge is banded 'it ceases to be the poll tax'. The SNP, therefore, would end its rebellion when amended legislation was tabled."

I put it kindly to the hon. Gentleman, because I do not want a major debate, that there is now some doubt, at least, about his party's stance.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman did not have the pleasure of being at the conference that I attended, which was reported by *The Guardian*. What was under discussion was under what terms the Scottish National party would reduce its level of opposition to the poll tax to the same level as that of the Labour party. The answer is, when the tax reflects ability to pay and when the poorest sections of the community are properly and immediately protected. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) should be familiar with that formulation, because I used it on a radio programme to which the hon. Gentleman also contributed, and his reply was that the formulation was "obvious".

Mr. Dewar: This debate will run and run.

I had the advantage of listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) who genuinely made the point that the only effective way of opposing the poll tax was his road of non-payment. However, we are now told that, if there is amending legislation, of some sort as yet undefined, the SNP will abandon non-payment and will reduce the level of its opposition. That will have a ring of insincerity to most people in Scotland. I have a lot of sympathy with the leader of the SNP, who has a problem, but he is in this position because he knows that non-payment has lost credibility and is increasingly unpopular with the vast majority of Scots.

I want to make it clear that, for Labour, the only acceptable answer to this discredited tax is its abolition. We are the true radicals in this matter. On coming to government, the Labour party will act immediately to abolish the 20 per cent. rule, and will introduce a property-based assessment that is linked to the ability to pay. We are not going to hang around, and I shall tell Conservative Members why. One of the many disappointing features of the Secretary of State's speech was that, on the basis of accountability, he came close to ruling out any relief for the poorest members of our community.

I genuinely do not understand the Conservative party's position on this matter. If the Government argue, as I understand they do, that a tax which raises about 50 per cent. of the revenue of local government has to be paid if people are to qualify for the vote, the logic is that anyone who is below the threshold for income tax should lose the vote as well. However, Governments of both persuasions rightly say that raising the tax threshold is an important social objective, because it helps the poorest in our society. If that is right for income tax, it is right for the poll tax as well.

Mr. Nellist: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) should give way.

Mr. Dewar: Well, I cannot imagine that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) would disagree with what I have just said—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give him a chance."] Let me make it clear——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: No, my hon. Friend is not assisting. I have only three or four minutes, and I intend to try to make a point of some importance.

Helping the very poorest is particularly important in my constituency, and in Scotland generally. The problems of the collection of local government finance have been appallingly exacerbated by the introduction of the poll tax. In Strathclyde, 877 staff—an increase of 145 per cent.—have had to be brought into post. That is a disgrace.

Another frightening statistic is that 800,000 people in Scotland depend on income support, and 22 per cent. of all children in Scotland under the age of 16 live in families that depend on income support. There is no grace in income support. There is no room for gracious living. The whole crux of the social argument against the poll tax is that the burden has shifted on to those people—it falls on the people who can least afford to pay it. It is for that reason that I deplore and regret the fact that the Secretary

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of State appeared to shut the door on the immediate help that could be achieved by the abolition of the 20 per cent. rule.

The Secretary of State for the Environment gave us a rash of ideas which were often incompatible. He frequently contradicted himself as he went along. We have had nothing at all from the Secretary of State for Scotland. Clearly, it is important that we should hear something tonight explaining his position. I want to be sure that we are in possession of at least some outline of the Government's plans in Scotland.

I know that the Secretary of State for Scotland will try to attack our proposals. I am not afraid of that—he is entitled to do so. However, one person who has not been present during today's debates, but who is in people's minds, is the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). He could have endorsed Labour's plans when he argued in Cabinet and repeated last week in his lecture:

"Taxes on property are cheap to collect and difficult to avoid. They have a clear local base. They bear a rough-and-ready relationship to ability to pay."

I hope he will not think me presumptuous when I say that that could have been me defending the Labour party's plans.

The right hon. Member for Blaby also said that his property-based scheme

"would have acted as a dampener on the great house price boom that was to make the conduct of economic policy so difficult."

No one is better equipped than the right hon. Gentleman to talk about how difficult the conduct of economic policy became under this Government. He said, in terms that might have echoed it, that which, during his campaign at least, the Secretary of State for the Environment said. The right hon. Member for Blaby warned the Cabinet that the scheme was

"completely unworkable and politically catastrophic".

Those terms have been borne out by the facts, and the Secretary of State for Scotland should bear them in mind when he comes to reply. He may yet have to eat his words and, before long, explain his conversion to a scheme based on a property assessment, while the Minister of State, Scottish Office, sings extracts from "Fiddler on the Roof".

The poll tax must go because it is esentially unjust. It has reinforced inequality and divided communities. The administrative nightmare and the bitterness have justified in full measure the charges laid against the tax from the beginning of the Scottish debate. I remember with some pain the cutting contempt with which some of my colleagues were treated by Scottish Office Ministers during our arguments in Committee. Now, the Tory party, horrified by the electoral damage the tax has done, has abandoned the Prime Minister and is searching in blind panic for any way out.

The case against the poll tax was put strongly in 1987 by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), when he said:

"All of these resentments"

against the poll tax

"will build on a platform of crude regression which seeks to make equal in the eyes of the tax collector the rich and the poor, the slum dweller and the landed aristocrat, the elderly pensioners living on their limited savings and the most successful of today's entrepreneurs."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1141.]

I cannot think of a more concise, eloquent and effective demolition job of the essential principles of the poll tax. I hope that I can give the right hon. Gentleman the credit for thinking that he is consistent in his moral attitudes and beliefs, and that what happens at the end of the review will measure up to that devastating indictment of an unjust tax, which should never have been put on the statute book.

I warn the Scottish Office that the electorate in Scotland will expect such a root and branch attack on the principles of the tax. The people expect abolition and nothing less. They will not accept compromise that merely repackages the unacceptable in a vain effort to save political face.

9.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on his maiden speech. His predecessor, Mike Carr, was here a tragically short time, but during that time he showed a commitment to the welfare of his constituents that will long be remembered. I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his knowledge of Bootle and on the commitment that he has shown to its people and problems. He is welcome in the House, and we look forward to hearing more from him in future.

I also thank the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) for his welcome to me. Thereafter, however, his speech degenerated into his usual fast-talking and frenetic exposition which on this occasion, I suspect, betrayed the air of a man who knows that his party has only just saved its skin in two by-elections—*[Interruption.]* Nevertheless, we welcome the new hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), and we shall have an opportunity to welcome them more fully on another occasion.

I shall come shortly to suggestions by Opposition Members in this debate, but from my hon. Friends came a number of positive and well-argued proposals. I have taken careful note of the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) and others.

When calling for change in varying degrees, however, it is important to keep in our minds a fact which sometimes escapes the Opposition—that local government must be paid for. There is no magic formula to wish the problem away. The review that we are undertaking under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be detailed and thorough. Some changes may be feasible in the short term—any major change would take some time—but local government must continue to be paid for while we carry out the review and while any changes, major or minor, are considered and possibly introduced. Local services must continue to be provided, and local authorities must fulfil their statutory duty to collect what is due to them.

Mr. Favell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new position and wish him all the best. Parties on both sides of the House have long sought to make local government accountable. Tony Crosland tried to do that 25 years ago, and this Government have tried it too. Are not 2,934,000 people employed by local government—one in nine of the working population? Whatever else the community charge has done, it has at long last made those people accountable to the people who paid for their services—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that this is a brief intervention.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that local government will continue to be accountable, whatever happens under the review?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend touches on an important principle, to which I shall come shortly.

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Mr. Lang: I hope that the irresponsible hon. Members who abuse their status as hon. Members by urging non-payment or by indulging in it themselves will abandon their disgraceful posture, which so damages the interests of the most vulnerable members of society who might follow their example. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) about that. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is in that category, and he asked me about the state of collection in Scotland. His reprehensible campaign and that of his hon. Friends has failed there. When registration was taking place, a number of Opposition Members began a non-registration campaign—a "stop it" campaign. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) said that

"it would develop into Scotland's biggest campaign movement since the second world war."

But registration succeeded among 99 per cent. of the population.

As for payment, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) said was collapsing in Scotland, he might like to know that more than 90 per cent. of budgeted revenue from the community charge is now being collected. As that accounts for only one fifth of total expenditure by local authorities, that means that 98 per cent. of their revenue is available to them, and any local authority which cannot adapt its spending programmes to account for a shortfall of 1 or 2 per cent. should not be running a local authority.

Mr. Douglas: If things are so good, why are they so bad? Why the review?

Mr. Lang: We are looking at the structure of the tax and at objections to it, and at propositions which have been put to us as to how it can be further improved——

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said earlier in the debate that there could be no quick fix or easy solution. We are determined to find the best and fairest way forward to ensure that the system is fair and seen to be fair by the whole electorate.

Mr. Dewar: This is an important matter. The right hon. Gentleman says that the committee will consider whether any change is feasible and whether to look at the structure of the tax. In that context, he appears to be ruling out radical change or abolition. Is that correct?

Mr. Lang: No, the hon. Gentleman must have misheard me—we rule nothing in and we rule nothing out. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hear a phrase that has been used before in the debate.

Mr. Lang: I said that some changes might be feasible in the short term and that some might take longer. If the hon. Gentleman reads the *Official Report* tomorrow he will see that that is what I said.

In our enthusiasm to achieve our objective, we must not lose sight of the strength of the underlying principles that are already embodied in the community charge. In that context, I am entirely at one with my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Mr. Favell), for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) and for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), and with my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). The principle that everyone should pay is widely acknowledged as a fundamental part of a healthy democratic system. The community should be involved in the affairs of its council not only by electing its members but by having to bear some responsibility for the decisions taken by those members, and contributing towards the cost is an important principle.

The community charge is a broad-based system of taxation. There is now a transparent relationship between the spending decisions of local authorities and community charge levels. There is also greater local accountability which, over time, will strengthen the cause of local democracy.

Mr. Nellist: The right hon. Gentleman talks about accountability. I should like to ask the question that one of my hon. Friends tried to ask. The Minister's right hon. and hon. Friends spoke of everyone having to pay something towards local services or they would lose the right to vote. Can he explain why those same Tory Members voted for the Government to spend £425,000 to extend the vote to 18,000 South African and Spanish residents who have paid nothing towards local services for 20 years? They pay nothing, so why should they have a vote?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is relevant to a review of the functioning of the community charge, he is welcome to make a submission to me, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and those who will be considering the matter, but his recommendation would carry more authority if he would pay his own community charge and thus for his share of local services.

The review will be fundamental. It proposes no options. I guarantee to the House that we shall not lightly throw away the ground that has been gained in recent years in establishing the principle that I have outlined. We shall seek to build on the greater accountability and fairness that have already been won. Any change in the current arrangements will be introduced only if and when it is seen to be fair and workable. The search for improvement is natural and sensible, and it is consistent with our record. Anyone who considers what has happened in the past couple of years will see a whole raft of changes to the community charge to refine the system and make it more acceptable.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the non-payment campaign by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) has come to a rather ignominious end because that excellent organisation the Freedom Association has paid the hon. Gentleman's poll tax in Lambeth for him? It is somewhat hypocritical of the

[Mr. Riddick]

hon. Gentleman to continue to urge others not to pay the poll tax when he knows perfectly well that he is now safe from the law.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend's intervention is a remarkable revelation and puts the hon. Gentleman's smiling face in a clearer perspective.

Plainly, there is a need for a more wide-ranging review than we have had hitherto.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. There can be only one hon. Member on his feet at a time. If the Secretary of State does not give way, other hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is just the point. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Lang: I would be more inclined to give way to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) if he could stand up and tell me that he has paid his contribution, but I know that he has not.

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Lang: We have heard some sensible suggestions for change today. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) suggested that accountability might be strengthened by moving from a system of elections every three years to a system that created greater accountability on a year-by-year basis. We shall certainly consider that.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Secretary of State to refer to an hon. Member without giving way to him?

Mr. Speaker: That often happens. The point that I want to make to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) is that, if the Secretary of State does not give way to him, although I suppose that he may, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Lang: Many sensible and interesting suggestions were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North and by the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham). They suggested ways in which the community charge benefits system might be changed. I can assure them that we will look carefully at those suggestions as we will at the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) about the possibility of a special Select Committee.

I want to consider what the Labour party has to offer. Where does the Labour party stand? We are interested in the Opposition's suggestions. Let us begin with the Leader of the Opposition. We know that he is against rates, because he said so. He described them as the most unjust of taxes. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that rates were

"an irrational, inefficient, highly resented form of taxation. If a thing does not make sense—and the rating system makes no sense whatsoever, the right thing to do is to abolish it once and for all."

Fine—we know where we are, or do we? Today, the hon. Member for Dagenham, brandishing a pamphlet entitled "Fair Rates" with all the profoundity of someone who supports sunny weather, said that the basis of local government finance must be the rating system. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that two years ago as well.

Where does that leave the Leader of the Opposition? A month after the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook had said that, Lord McIntosh, the Labour local government spokesman in another place said that rates

"are desperately inadequate as a fair basis for raising revenue for local government."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 May 1988; Vol. 497, c. 652.]

Then the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that he wanted a local income tax:

"I have been an advocate of this as an addition to—not a replacement for—the rating system for a long time."

Where does that leave the Leader of the Opposition? His private office announced in April last year that he wanted "a period of reflection", according to *The Independent*. By July, the reflection had concluded and he said:

"we are sophisticating the policy."

Mr. Dewar: I am just trying to define the terms of the debate. Is it the Secretary of State's understanding that the working party of which he is a distinguished member has turned its back on and ruled out any form of property-based assessment?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has not listened to what we have been saying. We have ruled nothing in and we have ruled nothing out. However, I can understand why he does not want to hear more about the "sophistication" of policy promised by the Labour party. What does this new sophistication of domestic rates involve? Is it sophisticated to have a system under which less than half the adult population makes any contribution? Is it sophisticated to have a method of payment for local services based solely on the bricks and mortar in which one happens to live? Is it sophisticated to have a system that disregards the capacity of individuals to pay and that ignores the ability to pay of millions of adult wage earners who are not householders? Is it sophisticated to have a system that demands from a single parent in one house the same amount as from four or five working adults in the house next door?

We know more about sophistication in Scotland because the policy there has gone one step further. The Opposition have promised domestic rates to start with and then, by courtesy of the Scottish Assembly—in itself no more than a tax-raising body—a roof tax.

Mr. Wilson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: No; the hon. Gentleman was not present for most of the debate.

Scotland is to be the guinea pig for this so-called sophisticated instrument, which will be based on capital values. If a house in Aberdeen, for example, varies in price, its owner's contribution to local services will vary accordingly. It will be in accord with the spot price of oil in Rotterdam. We shall have the turbulence of revaluations. They would not bear on every house, as the Labour party has said, but on one house in each area. The Labour party would pick what it has called a beacon.

In my mind, a beacon is something to which one sets fire to deliver a message. The Labour party means by a beacon that we would pay rates based not on our own house but on someone else's in the same area. If that someone else had a garage, double glazing, central heating or a granny flat, it would be tough on those who did not have those facilities in their houses. They would have to pay more because someone had more than they.

Mr. Maxton: I have listened to the Secretary of State with considerable interest. I remember reading a headline in this week's *Scotland on Sunday*. It read: "Heseltine Prefers a Return to the Rating System". If the Secretary of State for the Environment proposes a return to the rating system, what will the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends do, bearing in mind that they have been such loyal defenders of the poll tax?

Mr. Lang: As I told the representatives of the Scottish press on Monday, they should not believe everything they write in the newspapers.

Consider the problems of a widow under the Labour party's roof tax. One spouse dies, the house is too large for the remaining spouse, but all the furniture is there so he or she remains in it, despite the fall in income. Under the community charge, the system is benign because the cost of local services halves, but under the roof tax the charge will continue accelerating while income declines. If the widow cannot pay, under the Labour party's proposal the local authority, year by year and piece by piece, would start to take over ownership of her house. It would be, "Don't worry, love, we shall get it when you're dead." It is "live now, pay later." It is "pay as you die."

Consider the accumulating anxiety and distress of an elderly widow as, year by year, the security of her house is stripped away from her. Contemplate her mounting terror when, alone and aging—just when life's problems should be receding—she sees herself running out of credit and wonders how it will all end. That is the Labour party's sophisticated plan for Scotland's funding of local government. That is the obscenity that it would foist on the people of Scotland, which would be not the guinea pig but the sacrificial lamb.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman's rather intemperate attack sounds rather like one that could be mounted against the rent-to-mortgage scheme of which he is so proud. In the few minutes that remain before the debate must end, will he answer some of the positive questions that the Opposition have asked about the structure of the proposed consultation and the agenda, so that we can understand what is being offered to us?

Mr. Lang: It seems that we have made progress during the debate. At the beginning of it, Opposition Members threw up their hands in horror. They wanted nothing to do with the offer of consultation and discussion that was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. They want now to know what is on the agenda. That is progress. They have had their opportunity to put forward what they regard as being relevant and suitable. If they put forward all the proposals for local authority funding that they have developed over the past few years, we shall have to spend a long time ploughing through them.

The truth is that Labour is not interested in the taxpayer or in individuals generally. It is interested only in taxes. It does not want taxation to be fair but only to be easy. As a new Labour Government built up their raft of new and higher taxes to pay for their usual extravagant programme—the rake's progress of high spend, high taxes and high inflation—the ability to pay, which we would regard as important, would become no more than a sick joke.

A new Labour Government would impoverish us, just as their predecessors did. Those in the Labour party are tax maniacs. A former leader of the Labour party, Hugh Gaitskell, said that he would fight, fight and fight again to save the party he loved. Now, it wants to do is tax, tax and tax again to destroy the country we love.

It will be a thorough review, it will be a constructive review, it will be a fundamental review. It will put the interests of the charge payers first. It will seek justice, fairness and good local government. We shall persevere with it until that is what we achieve.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:-

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 311.

Division No. 20] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce

Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambaSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*

Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 232.

Division No. 21] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles

Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
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Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
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Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
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Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
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Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Prime Minister and the Government for their decision to undertake a careful and fundamental review of the community charge; and deplores the fact that despite several unsatisfactory attempts, the Labour Party has failed to come forward with any clear or workable proposals of its own.

Local Health Councils (Scotland)

10.28 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Local Health Councils) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 2230), dated 7th November 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th November, be annulled.

A recent article in *The Scotsman* wondered why there was no public outcry at the fact that local health councils were allegedly under threat. It is fair to say that letters received by hon. Members on behalf of local health councils have been sent only from members of the councils or their secretaries. That illustrates part of the problem. Local health councils have a low public profile and are seen, quite wrongly, by a large proportion of the public as having no useful role to play in the national health service. Clearly, something needs to be done about their role and functions.

No one is more aware of the problem than the local health councils themselves. That is why for a number of years they have been asking to have their structure and function reviewed. Rather belatedly, the Scottish Office agreed to that, and a review was carried out by Arthur Young Management Consultancy. Unfortunately, it was an unsatisfactory and perfunctory review, which recommended the abolition of local health councils and their replacement by directors of consumer affairs.

Local health councils were clearly under threat, so I met the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils. We discussed the problem and found that the association's view was similar to mine. Therefore, in May 1989 we agreed that I should put some proposals to the Minister. We agreed that the status quo was not acceptable and that 44 councils were too many. We accepted that there should be a reduction and streamlining in the number of councils with the aim of one council per board.

As well as in Orkney and Shetland, there are already single councils in the Borders, in Dumfries and Galloway and more recently, as a result of an amalgamation, there is now a single council in Ayrshire and Arran.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Galbraith: I will just finish this point.

We also agreed that there should be flexibility in the number of councils. Although the aim was to be one per board, for reasons of geography, as in the highlands, or large population, as in Glasgow, there would need to be some flexibility and some boards would have more than one council, but with the ultimate aim of one per board. We also wanted representation from each of the amalgamated areas to be guaranteed in the new councils.

Mr. David Marshall: Perhaps I was rather hasty in my intervention. My hon. Friend has clarified part of the point that I wanted to make in relation to the number of health councils in the Greater Glasgow health board area. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful to reduce the number of health councils from five to just one, and to reduce the number of people actively participating in the councils from more than 130 to only 15, who will be hand picked by the health board? Is that not outrageous?

Mr. Galbraith: I was about to deal with the problem of Glasgow. When the Minister and I met, we agreed that for areas of large population such as Glasgow, one health council would be unsuitable.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): If that is what the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils agreed, I suggest that that body was not properly representing all the local health councils in Scotland. For example, Argyll and Bute strongly opposes abolition. There is no way in which a local health council operating from Paisley or Dumbarton can properly represent a unique area such as Argyll and Bute.

Mr. Galbraith: Part of the problem facing local health councils is that they can never speak with one voice. That is one of the reasons for reducing their number. That was agreed with representatives of the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils and, as I have said, I have received no representations from members of the public.

Mrs. Michie: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the letters that I have received are not from local health councils, but from members of the public and community councils all over my constituency.

Mr. Galbraith: I have had no such letters, but I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comment.

As I have said, that was the position agreed with the local health councils and their umbrella body. Taking into account geography and population, there are good reasons for having only one health council per board. Is it really necessary, for example, for five separate councils to scrutinise the board's minutes and go through the Scottish Home and Health Department's circulars? I think not.

Most important of all, more than one council means more than one view, and the views expressed are often diametrically opposed. Boards can either ignore the councils' opinion on the basis that they cannot agree, which is often the case, or accept the one that suits them best and use it against other councils. We should therefore be thinking in terms of one council per board.

As a by-product of the reduction in numbers, resources would be freed. All staff could be re-employed and, rather than duplicate the work, could develop and expand their talents. Money would also be available for better accommodation and better sites. Rather than health councils being hidden away in obscure health board premises, they could be housed in shop-front premises in large thoroughfares, where they could be seen by the public and readily available to them.

In May 1989, with the agreement and support of the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils, I had a meeting with the Minister at which I proposed such streamlining. I also put forward proposals for beefing up councils, with shop-front premises and more staff. In addition, I suggested that councils should be consulted earlier by boards in the preparation of their strategy plans. As a result of that meeting, the future of local health councils, which had been under threat, was assured.

The Minister will remember that, at his request, I then submitted my full package to him in writing. The Association of Scottish Local Health Councils was given a copy and it was pleased with the position. It seemed that

we were all agreed. I was therefore somewhat surprised when the Minister tried to impose single councils even in the highlands and in Glasgow.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): And in Grampian.

Mr. Galbraith: And in other areas, for reasons of geography. Although we had no formal agreement. I felt that the Minister had gone back on our understanding that there would be flexibility and that there would certainly be more than one council in the areas that I have mentioned.

I was pleased when the Minister retreated from that position in his response to his hon. Friends on 17 October and made it clear that schemes for more than one council would be considered on their merits, with population figures and geography being taken into account. I therefore ask the Minister to confirm that there will be flexibility in the number of councils, based on geography and population. Surely the Greater Glasgow health board, dealing with a population of about 2 million, needs more than the one council proposed by the board. Will the Minister reject that proposal and ask the board to think again?

Will the Minister also consider the question of premises? It is difficult for the public to contact their local health council when it is lost up a stair in some run-down, far-off hospital. Will the hon. Gentleman ask boards to site their council premises, if not in shop-front premises, at least in a busy thoroughfare where the public can see them and gain easy access to them?

Will the Minister also use the resources freed by the reduction in the number of councils to ensure better staffing of councils, including better secretarial services? If councils are to fulfil their functions properly, they cannot continue with one paid official and limited secretarial services.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that the staff should be wholly controlled by the council rather than their appointment being dependent on the board? I also put it to my hon. Friend that there is tremendous concern about the proposals in Lothian. I am sure that he intends that, whatever scheme is proceeded with, it should demonstrably have the support of the local communities rather than being cobbled up between the health councils and the boards.

Mr. Galbraith: It is important that any scheme should have the support of the local community and not just the support of the local health councils. Does the Minister accept that, if the health boards are to be seen to be independent, it will be necessary for them to appoint their own staff? It is bad enough that members of health councils are appointed by health boards, but when the officials who do much of the up-front work are also appointed by the boards, any semblance of independence disappears.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): In his review of the way in which health councils are to be constituted, has the hon. Gentleman given any consideration to the fact that local authorities are no longer permitted to nominate members to health councils? Is that not a defect in the proposals which justifies criticism of the Government?

Mr. Galbraith: I do not think that any group should necessarily have a right to place members on a local health council, but nor should anyone be excluded from health councils. However, if a local authority proposes a member for a health board, the board should have good reasons if it turns down the request.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I should be interested to learn how the hon. Gentleman believes that members of the health councils should be appointed or elected. He has made it clear that he does not believe that the local authorities should be involved in the process, so presumably he is also ruling out the district trades councils. How are people to arrive on those organisations?

Mr. Galbraith: My view is that anyone should be able to nominate members for health councils and that no group should be excluded. That is the current position.

Mrs. Ewing: How are the members to be selected?

Mr. Galbraith: By the health board, as is the current position—unless the hon. Lady has a different proposition, in which case I should be interested to hear it.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman is making the Minister's speech.

Mr. Galbraith: I am not, but that is the current position.

The Minister has proposed that the councils should have a membership of 15, but I ask him to think again. Now that there are to be fewer councils, with more work, it seems appropriate to increase the number of members serving on them. To deal with the increased workload, why not allow councils to form sub-committees to which they could co-opt members, which would enable them to have area committees to deal with the specific areas that they look after? That is the system that the Minister is proposing for the health boards. If it is good enough for the health boards, it is surely good enough for the local health councils.

Finally, will the Minister have an early meeting with representatives from the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils? When he discusses this matter with them, he will find that there are a number of areas of agreement and that their views and his own are not so far apart as he might think. It would be nice if at least one change in the NHS could be brought about by consensus and co-operation rather than the usual confrontation.

10.41 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) appeared almost to have been briefed by the Scottish Office. I agree with many of his points, which is how it should be. In a matter of this kind, it is good that there should be agreement between the parties.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Has the Minister been briefed by the Scottish Office?

Mr. Forsyth: I have, indeed, and I shall try to speak to the brief, as the hon. Gentleman would expect.

Local health councils have existed in Scotland since 1975. Since that time there have been significant changes in how the health service is administered, but the councils' role has largely gone unchanged, despite the abolition in the mid-1980s of the district tier of administration on which many of the councils were based and despite the fact that the original departmental guidance setting up the

[Mr. Forsyth]

councils envisaged a review after two or three years. That review was not carried out until the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils came to see me in 1988.

In preparing for this debate, I called for the note of my meeting at that time with the association. Hon. Members will be interested to know that this recorded that the chairman was anxious to see in Scotland a strong independent voice speaking for the consumer and that he was concerned that local health councils were struggling to fulfil their original role and often chose the easy route of highlighting bad news and inefficiencies. I mean no disrespect to the individuals who sit on the councils, many of whom devote a great deal of time and effort to the task, but I suspect that most would associate themselves with that criticism.

Mrs. Ray Michie: No.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady may disagree, but that was the view of the chairman of the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils, who represents the health councils. As the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden has said, the 1988 review was carried out by the consultants Arthur Young. It confirmed the general disquiet about the role and performance of councils. It concluded that councils were having only a relatively low impact on decisions of health boards and recommended their abolition. I did not accept that because it seemed too radical a solution. In line with the comments made by the hon. Gentleman, we felt that there was a case for looking at councils and their structure and finding a more explicit role for them.

Mr. David Marshall: Does the Minister accept that not all the health councils are members of the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils? If what he has just said is the opinion of that association, I am surprised if it has any health councils in its membership because the sentiments he expressed were not those of many Opposition Members.

Mr. Forsyth: They were broadly representative of the view among health councils then. That was certainly what the independent councils established. Everybody knows that the health councils have not played the role anticipated for them in the 1974 legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who was responsible for piloting the legislation through the House, has expressed doubts about the role and functions of the health councils following the introduction of the legislation. The promise made then to carry out a review was not kept, and the councils were left on the sidelines, and they felt that.

It was the only meeting I can recall in the Scottish Office at which an organisation's representatives have asked us to abolish them or give the organisation a proper role. We decided to go for the latter course. Clearly, health councils have a role to play. They are ideally placed to offer local comment on proposals for health services in their districts and, by undertaking visits to hospitals and units, can help to ensure that services are kept up to scratch. They also provide a useful source of advice to patients with complaints about the service that they receive. However, all of that has to be seen to operate in an environment in which the health boards' role is changing.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): The Minister emphasised the local aspect of local health councils. He cannot by any stretch of the imagination describe the city of Glasgow as one locality. Does he not accept that one of the reasons for anxiety in the city of Glasgow is that the Greater Glasgow health board is made up of people who do not come from the major districts for which hospitals have to provide? It contains no one from Easterhouse, Castlemilk or Govan. If he is to reduce the number of boards from 130 to 13, he will effectively cut out the vast majority of the citizens from any critical contact they have with the health service.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the health councils' role is not to be representational in a geographic sense, but to represent the patients' interests. To do that effectively, the health council must be composed of able people, properly resourced and backed up in an organisation that can talk to the health board on equal terms. The Greater Glasgow health board is substantial and, in order for patients to be effectively represented, we need a strong, properly resourced, health council. That is why the strategy has been to encourage the boards to put forward proposals that look towards single health councils rather than a proliferation.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have been attacked for seeking to weaken health councils. If we really wanted to do so and to make them ineffective, we would have proposed a proliferation of health councils that were not properly serviced or resourced, which would have taken us back to the original position after the 1974 legislation.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister said that he believes that health councils should be properly resourced. I agree with that as a general proposition. Does he agree that one of the most important resources for a health council to enable it to carry out its functions is that of information? Why do not the regulations provide that health councils should be able to exact information from hospital trusts and not simply from the national health service and local health boards?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is being extremely unfair because the regulations provide a basis for the health councils to obtain information from the boards. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that NHS trusts, which he opposes and of which we as yet have no examples in Scotland—but we will have——

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): No.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Member does not think that there will be any NHS trusts, it is odd that his colleague asked that question. The hon. Gentleman will know that NHS trusts will operate under contract to the board, and any information about the provision of service will be provided by the board, and the board will be responsible for the standard of service. There is no contradiction in that.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall, but for the last time.

Dr. Godman: That is kind of the Minister. In this new era of flexibility in ministerial decision making, may I ask

the hon. Gentleman to reconsider what appears to be his proposed option for a single health council for the Argyll and Clyde health board area? That board has asked for two councils on the basis of representations made by its four local health councils.

Mr. Forsyth: There seems to be some confusion about this. The regulations show that it is up to the health boards to put forward schemes. I have not seen the scheme to be put forward by Argyll and Clyde. The Government have taken the view that single health councils, properly resourced and serviced, are the way forward for representing effectively the wishes of the patients. However, it is open to boards to put forward schemes. Grampian health board, for instance, has put forward a scheme for one health council for the whole of Grampian region. Other boards may put forward other schemes, and they will be considered solely on their merits. I cannot anticipate what decisions will be taken before I have seen the schemes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I have said that I have given way for the last time.

Increasingly we shall look to the boards to determine the health needs of those in their areas and to purchase —whether from their own units or NHS trusts—services commensurate with that need. In drawing up their strategies and monitoring the services provided, they will be looking for constructive advice from health councils. A multitude of councils, as at present, thinly resourced and largely unco-ordinated in their efforts is not the best way of providing that advice—in fact, quite the reverse. What we need are strong councils capable of talking to boards on a one-to-one basis.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The hon. Gentleman said a moment ago that he could not pre-judge any proposals that health boards might make to him on the constitution of the health councils in their areas. Earlier this year he issued a circular in which he instructed health boards to ensure that they submitted schemes for only one health council in each health board's area. Does he now accept that that circular was in that respect ultra vires in relation to the principal legislation and in relation to the terms of regulation 3?

Mr. Forsyth: I have replied to the hon. and learned Gentleman's letters and answered the question put to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). The hon. and learned Gentleman understands the position perfectly well. The boards can put forward schemes that we will consider on their merits. The Government's view is that representation of the interests of the patients and making the consumers' voice heard in the health service are best served by single councils, properly resourced.

This is not only the Government's view. A number of boards have favoured this course. For example, Orkney and Shetland and Borders——

Mr. Wallace: Orkney and Shetland have a health board each.

Mr. Forsyth: Indeed. Orkney and Shetland and Borders, all represented by Liberal Members of Parliament, have always had a single council. Until 1980, Dumfries and Galloway had four councils, but at the suggestion of the councils the number was reduced to one. Last year a similar step was taken in Ayrshire and Arran, which previously had two councils.

On this matter I am happy to acknowledge that wisdom is not confined to Members on the Government side of the House. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden has given his blessing to the principle of one council per board area, although he reserved his position in respect of Glasgow and Highland when he came to see me.

The Association of Scottish Local Health Councils is also on record as favouring single councils. A resolution at its 1989 annual general meeting, passed by 24 votes to three with two abstentions, supported the proposals for

"A body at health board level, properly resourced and staffed independent of the Health Board and required to manage and deploy it resources at local level across the Health Board area in accordance with the NHS principles of equity and access".

The association has since made much of the qualification in the resolution that there should be area organisations. It stated:

"the area level organisation may as part of its remit establish at local level bodies adequately staffed and funded with due regard to geographical and population distribution".

The association seems to be advocating the possibility of an additional tier of council.

I understand that an experiment in The Borders, which the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) will know all about and which was established by the council there, has not proved successful as a result of the difficulty of appointing representative members. However, I recognise that there may be occasions when councils will wish to establish ad hoc groups to give advice on the position in a particular local area. Nothing in the regulations precludes that.

The regulations provide the framework within which the councils will operate. They cover the submission of schemes by boards, the functions of councils and the related requirements of boards to consult and provide relevant information. They allow for councils to visit NHS premises and make provision for staffing, accommodation and finance. The regulations allow for existing councils to remain until the new councils are established.

This new framework for local health councils has to be seen in the context of the important changes now being introduced into the health service. These will ensure that the needs of patients are at the very heart of health service priorities. Strong and effective councils, with members solely appointed on merit, have an important role to play as consumer watchdogs. We simply cannot afford to allow the old, ineffective arrangements to continue. What is needed are new councils fully able to meet the challenges of an invigorated national health scheme. The regulations provide the way forward.

10.56 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The regulations need to be seen in the context of the drastic changes that are taking place in the national health service in Scotland. Those changes are nowhere more evident than in Lothian region. I fully accept the Minister's statement that, if we have to make a choice between funding a consumer representative organisation, a consultative committee such as a local health council and patient care, there is no doubt about the decision that people would make. They would want to spend their money on patient care.

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

At a time of such drastic changes, especially in areas such as my constituency, there is a need for an effective consumer voice so that patients and their families can make their views known to those who make the decisions —the Minister and the health boards. As the Minister knows, I am acutely concerned about what is happening to the national health service in my constituency. It has been sorely hit by the package of cuts that have been imposed by Lothian health board, partly as a consequence of bad management by that board, and partly because of underfunding by the Scottish Office.

As a result of those cuts, our one geriatric hospital is to be closed and replaced by a private unit in Roodlands hospital in Haddington. The cuts also mean that we are to lose our local accident and emergency and casualty service.

The Minister and Lothian health board assured me that a casualty service would continue to be maintained at Roodlands hospital. However, last week I discovered that the Scottish ambulance service was instructed that all casualties in my constituency were to be taken to hospitals in Edinburgh because there was no effective casualty service left in Haddington.

Against such a backdrop, it is vital that patients are effectively represented in the debates that are going on about the future of the services that are vital to patients and their families. East Lothian health council has rather distinct interests from those of other parts of the Lothian region. There are obvious differences between what happens in East Lothian, West Lothian and Midlothian and in the city of Edinburgh. Even the Minister should be able to grasp that.

There must be some way in which opinion in an area like mine can be focused. The management of the national health service is ludicrously incestuous. The service is run on behalf of the Minister by the health boards that he appoints directly. He is accountable to no one. He certainly is not accountable to the electorate of Scotland, and the health board is accountable only to him.

At present, 80,000 people in my constituency are represented by one individual on Lothian health board. I am sure that it is pure coincidence that that person was appointed shortly after he lost his seat as a Conservative councillor for Dunbar on East Lothian district council. Perhaps that appointment was a consolation prize. The Minister told us that that person was appointed purely on merit.

It is now suggested that one local health council should cover the whole of Lothian. Again, East Lothian would probably have only one representative nominated by that health board. That is no way in which to organise consumer or patient representation.

Clearly, the valuable services of the local health council should be maintained. I understand that, as a compromise, East Lothian local health council has suggested that it would be happy to work with the neighbouring local health authority in Midlothian, where there is an understandable community of interest. However, to lump East Lothian as a nominally local health council in with the rest of the Lothian region does not make sense.

We need accountability in the national health service, particularly when the Government are inflicting such drastic cuts on health services in areas like mine. My constituents need to be represented. I appreciate that the regulations make it possible for there to be more than one local health council in health board areas. I hope that that will be the case.

11.2 pm

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I was slightly alarmed earlier because, after our previous debate this evening, I thought that we were gradually moving towards a consensus between the two Front Benches. That may have been unfashionable in recent years, but I do not find it wholly unwelcome in politics in Britain. However, my newly-fanned fires of enthusiasm were slightly dampened when the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) agreed with my hon. Friend the Minister. I began to think that perhaps this move to consensus was not so good as I had first thought. It filled me with alarm and has made me rather more diffident about what I am going to say than might otherwise have been the case.

While I believe that the local health councils should be subject to review and reorganised from time to time, and I welcome the review, I have several reservations about the consequences of that review. If the argument was that as the councils no longer served a purpose, they should be removed, that would have been the end of the matter. However, the fact that an area is to retain one health council must make us anxious about whether the council will be representative of the consumers of the health service in the areas covered by the health boards. If the principle is that we should retain a health council, we must consider whether the proposal offers representation in its area.

That is why I see grounds for rationalising and reducing the number of health councils. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, areas like Dumfries have willingly and voluntarily reduced their numbers. That reflects the local view.

I have genuine concern about wide geographic areas. It is appropriate that in Grampian, for example, there should be only one board, and I agree that there could be some rationalisation. I have advocated to the board that there should be one health council for Aberdeen, one for what I would describe broadly as north Grampian and one for south Grampian. I represent a constituency which stretches from Braemar, on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms, to within a mile of the centre of Aberdeen, at Duthie Park, where it adjoins the constituency of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran), and the interests of my constituents in those two places are entirely different. I feel sometimes that I represent two constituencies in a parliamentary sense.

Those who live in Kincorth or Garthdee, for example, have an interest in the health board quite different from that of those who live in Braemar. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be sensitive to that. My constituents in Kincorth and Garthdee were not much interested when at Upper Deeside and Torphins we were fighting to retain the local maternity hospital, which was a worthwhile cause and a battle in which the local health council played a sensible and constructive part. In the same way, I am sure that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) will appreciate that my constituents at St. Cyrus, at the south end of my constituency immediately

north of Montrose, do not have a great deal in common with those living at Elgin, up on the Moray firth. They are separated by many miles.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: With the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), the right hon. Gentleman and I have worked together on various health matters which have affected us generally in the Grampian region. Does he agree that it has been recommended by the five existing health councils in Grampian that there should be a minimum of three councils, an arrangement which would take account of the two rural geographic areas and Aberdeen? They are not saying that they should fight one another. When the Minister of State talks about flexibility, the views of the existing councils should be taken into account.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The hon. Lady makes a relevant point. If the existing health councils had decided to fight for the status quo, I would have found less credibility in their argument. Instead, they have said that it is important to ensure that health councils are representative in a geographic sense of the areas that they cover.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State when he said that health boards can have more than one council if they wish. That was encouraging. However, the Grampian health board said, "No, I am sorry, but we are going to have only one council." I am disappointed that the board did not take advantage of the latitude that it was offered. I think that there would have been a better set-up if it had done so.

I have been in correspondence with the Grampian health board and it has shown some sensitivity in responding to me, as it may have done to other hon. Members who represent constituencies in the region. It has stated that the membership of the council will be related primarily to geographic areas and secondly to population. That is a step forward, and one that I welcome.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will try to persuade the health boards, and especially the Grampian board, that if they are to have only one council they should try to provide that within that structure there are nominated sub-committees which are representative of different areas. In that way, there would be some sense of identification of an area. There would be a local sub-committee with which a local community could identify when it wished to submit views representative of a certain area. With sub-committees, local communities would be able to make submissions in the knowledge that there was a definite voice for their area within the council. In that way local views and problems could be aired and examined.

That final recommendation is second best to what I would want. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider my recommendation and press it on those health boards which have decided to have only one health council.

11.10 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I endorse the points made by the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) about the position in Grampian—which is itself somewhat peculiar as it is the health board that is part of the problem. That is not often the case in other areas.

The House should commend the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) for tabling the prayer. It is an important debate. We must sincerely commend him also for the genuine work and interest that he has put into the matter. There was a real worry that health councils would be abolished. He contributed greatly towards positively resolving that question. However, his remarks this evening have shown that he has a wholly west-coast, central industrial belt perspective. I am surprised that his party sources did not tell him earlier that he was on the wrong lines for the revision of the role and function of the health councils. It is commendable that he has so positively contributed to the debate, but his recommendations are inappropriate and wrong, certainly for the areas that I and other hon. Members represent.

The context of the debate is important. The whole structure and management machinery of the national health service has been recast. The lines of authority, the centres of decision making and the whole process of setting priorities are fundamentally changing. There are new conflicts within the new system. They are real and acute and they will be difficult to address. There will be ministerial political direction together with the direction of the new chief executive. There will be a general manager at local level and there will be health board members, and especially non-executive members. All of them will have to try to make the best judgment possible in new and very different circumstances.

That process worries me because it can be much more easily politically manipulated than the old consensual system. I am not saying that the old system was perfect but simply that any Government—not just the incumbent Government—will have immensely increased powers in manipulating the way that the management structure works. Health boards have a new set of pressures and priorities within which they must work. The difficulties that they face will be made worse because the system can be more politically manipulated.

It is more important than ever that the local health councils are independent, that they have adequate resources and that they have a real and meaningful standing in the local community, in the health boards and in St. Andrews house. There must be a proper recognition of their function and their role. They are the only statutory representatives of the public in the new system, and they are supposed to be separate from the management process. To succeed, they must be given adequate resources and genuine access to the new decision-making process. They need a proper place in the hierarchy.

Two major and connected issues arise from the regulations—first, the number of local health councils in each board area, a matter which has already been referred to, and, secondly, the ability of local health councils to decide what is best for their area.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kirkwood: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I do not want to take up more time than I have to.

The regulations are, on the face of it, flexible enough to get the number of local health councils right and for them to have the ability to decide what is best for them. It is what is in the Minister's mind that is causing the uncertainty and concern. He has given a clear signal that he wants one local health council per board, he has decided

[Mr. Kirkwood]

on 15 members, and he is not prepared to consider any district or sub-committee structure. The Minister is pointing at the Opposition Front Bench, but I am not responsible for the Opposition's policy on this. We have our own point of view.

We must make it clear to the Minister that one local health council per board area is unacceptable. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) eloquently made the point that the Government's circular was ultra vires, and other hon. Members have referred to that, too. The fact that local health councils have no powers of co-option is to be deplored. The boards have been given the power of co-option. My local health council has, as the Minister said, experimented with district sub-committees and co-opting people. It is keen to continue to co-opt people on specific issues and in specific localities as is necessary. The Minister says that it can, but the impression that it has received is that the Minister has set his face against that. It is regrettable that the regulations refer to a joint responsibility with health boards for appointing staff, and that compromises the independence of councils in an unacceptable way.

There is a cogent legal reason for voting against the regulations. As hon. Members will know, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has made three or four points about the validity of the orders. In its opinion, regulations 9, 11 and 12 are potentially outwith the Government's powers and appear to make an unexpected use of the powers conferred by the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978. If those turn out to be defects, they are far reaching.

The Committee questions whether the Government have power to require health boards to comment on reports produced by local health councils, whether there is a valid power to require health boards to provide local health councils with staff, accommodation and other facilities. It said that it could find no powers specifically available. Thirdly, regulation 4 empowers each local health council to keep under review the operation of the health service in its district, excluding NHS trusts, as was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

The House has not been able to study those points in depth because the report has not yet been published. But the Minister did not say a word about those potential defects. I hope that he will do so when he replies.

The Minister has a choice. He can create a strong consumer voice in the NHS, but he can do that only if he gives the new local health councils independence and strength and the resources that they need. If he does not do that, he will effectively stifle public scrutiny. He apparently wants to reduce the number of councils, retain control of their membership and diminish their role. It looks suspiciously like an attempt to sideline local health councils and limit their ability to represent the best interests of patients so that the Government are not embarrassed. It is not too late for him to think again, but it will be too bad for patients if he does not.

11.19 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I follow the remarks of the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith), because Grampian region has a broad geographical spread of urban and rural areas, and I strongly support the right hon. Gentleman's remarks in that regard.

What does the Minister mean when he talks of a strong voice for the consumer and strong, adequately-resourced health councils? From the regulations, it appears that the whole process will be in the hands of the health board. We know already of Grampian health board's decision to hear only one voice, and that it has ignored the local community's proposal that more voices are required properly to represent the views of consumers.

Over and above that, the regulations have an ideological bent that should not be ignored. *[Laughter.]* The Minister laughs, but I want to raise two matters of particular concern. The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments pointed out that the regulations contain no requirement for opted-out trusts to provide information.

I heard the Minister's earlier explanation, but I am well aware that one of the Scottish Office's favourite targets is Aberdeen royal infirmary. It provides a whole range of acute services, and it serves not only the city of Aberdeen and Grampian region but Orkney and Shetland, and some parts of the highlands and islands. If trust status is conferred on that hospital, the voice of the local health council—the consumer organisation—will be neutered. Its role will be diminished, because it will have no locus in respect of that particular hospital.

Paragraph 6 of the 1974 regulations, which this new measure will replace, imposed a duty on the health board to provide information, with no qualification except in relation to confidential information relating to patients or staff. The new regulations introduce a new area of confidentiality in respect of

"information in respect of which any rule of commercial confidentiality applies."

Again, that aspect is one from which local health councils will be excluded.

The whole ethos and direction of the health service is changing, and new economic and financial factors are being introduced into hospital management. The whole basis on which the health service was founded is being altered, and in this instance commercial contracts for the cleaning, pharmaceutical and laboratory services that we know will be in the pipeline if a Conservative Government remain in power will be excluded from investigation by local health councils.

I repeat my original question: what does the Minister mean when he talks of a strong local voice for the consumer, when the consumer will be denied representation in the vital areas that I mentioned?

11.22 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Unusually, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who made an accurate assessment and judgment of the situation. I am happy to support his remarks.

I represent a large rural constituency that forms a significant part of Tayside health board area. To me, it is nonsense to suggest that the people in the eastern end of my constituency, which is to the east of Forfar, understand

the feelings and actions of people in Glen Lyon or Drumochter. It is even more unrealistic to expect that in an area the size of Tayside.

The practical solution is the one on offer. It is that there should be one properly funded and adequately staffed health council per health board. If we attempt to do anything else, some areas will feel that they are not properly represented.

11.24 pm

Mr. Forsyth: I shall try to deal quickly with the points made in the debate in the short time that is left.

I was not aware of the position in respect of the casualty department that the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) raised, and I shall certainly look into that. However, his stance on health councils was different from that taken by members of the Opposition Front Bench.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) said that he was disappointed by the decision that Grampian health board has taken. He might wish to reflect that the health board reached that conclusion, I am sure, because it felt that it had a health council which would take advantage of the resources available to it. The point about ad hoc committees, which he and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned, is important. There is nothing in these regulations to prevent health councils from establishing ad hoc committees for a particular purpose. The decisions will remain with the health councils. Nor is there anything to prevent health boards appointing members to health councils, for which they will have to advertise and invite bodies to submit nominations, looking at the geographical spread and taking it into account, as my right hon. Friend said that Grampian would do.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also asked about comments made by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. As always, we are extremely grateful for the careful scrutiny of these matters which the Joint Committee carries out.

The hon. Gentleman will find that regulations 9, 11 and 12 are virtually identical to regulations 8, 10 and 11, which have been in existence since 1975, I believe. On his comment about the Secretary of State retaining control of membership, my right hon. Friend will not appoint members of health councils. They will be appointed by the health boards, having taken nominations from representative organisations and from members of the public.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) found an ideological bent in these regulations. I am sure that if that were so, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) would not have supported them to the extent that he has.

If Forresterhill becomes an NHS trust, it will be responsible to the Grampian health board, under contract, and the health council will still be able to obtain the information that they require.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Could the hon. Gentleman explain why he thinks that it automatically follows that one health council is an appropriate number for the Glasgow area when the general consensus among hon. Members representing Glasgow is that three is a reasonable number? What makes one health council better than three?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. Member has had differences of view with the Greater Glasgow health board. It is a large and powerful organisation. The consumer voice—the health council—needs to be a powerful and properly resourced organisation. If there are three such councils, the resources available to fund them will be divided in three. It is a matter for the judgment of the Greater Glasgow health board what conclusion it reaches as to the best way forward. It may, like Grampian, decide that it is better to have one council. It is a matter of judgment. When the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden came to see me some time ago, he argued that perhaps there was a case for having two councils—Glasgow, North and Glasgow, South. Whatever proposals come to us from the Greater Glasgow health board, from Argyll and Clyde, or any other health board, we shall examine them on their merits. When considering proposals, and reaching a judgment about them, we shall want to take account of the views that have been expressed in the debate, which have been fairly clear. It is a matter not simply of quantity, but of quality.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The Highland health board's proposal for eight councils makes sense in terms of the geography of the area and also in terms of patients, because most of their problems stem from the geography.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman must not tempt me into making a judgment in advance, or his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) will accuse me of being ultra vires. The highlands are very adequately represented by his own efforts in respect of their health needs. They manage with three Members of Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is not arguing that there should be eight Members of Parliament; he would be the first to quarrel with me if I suggested otherwise.

I believe that the regulations provide the health boards with an opportunity to establish a proper "patient voice" for the first time. We shall, of course, look at them in the light of experience, as always.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 121.

Division No. 22] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Kennedy, Charles
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Kirkwood, Archy
Beggs, Roy	Macdonald, Calum A.
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Maclennan, Robert
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Salmond, Alex
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Sillars, Jim
Cryer, Bob	Skinner, Dennis
Dalyell, Tam	Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Godman, Dr Norman A.	Wallace, James
Graham, Thomas	
Home Robertson, John	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Howells, Geraint	**Mrs. Margaret Ewing, and**
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	**Mrs. Ray Mitchie.**

NOES

Aspinwall, Jack	Carrington, Matthew
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Carttiss, Michael
Bevan, David Gilroy	Cash, William
Boswell, Tim	Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Chapman, Sydney
Bright, Graham	Chope, Christopher
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*	Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*

Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Fallon, Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Neil Hamilton and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Brain Injury Rehabilitation (Frenchay)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

11.40 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Frenchay health authority covers a substantial area to the east of Bristol, but it touches on my constituency in two respects. First, many of my constituents already look to Frenchay as an alternative provider of services to their home district of Southmead or the Central Bristol and Weston district. Many more are looking forward to the more consumer-oriented and more varied pattern of service that will inevitably develop in the three districts as a result of the Government's health service reforms next year. Secondly, a major part of Frenchay's provision for mental handicap is at Stoke Park hospital, which lies within the boundaries of the Bristol, North-West constituency, as does the independently funded Burden institute. It is likely that the staff of those two highly respected institutions would be the principal providers of the proposed service in respect of brain injury rehabilitation.

Despite a rapid increase in knowledge of the nature and rehabilitation of acquired brain injury around the world in the past decade, rehabilitation facilities and the study of rehabilitation techniques in the United Kingdom are sparse and unevenly distributed. The south west region has one small unit which serves only Cornwall. Wessex region has four in-patient general rehabilitation facilities, but no dedicated brain injury service exists in the south west or adjoining regions. I believe that there is no comprehensive organisation for the management, study and treatment of brain injury anywhere in the United Kingdom.

As a result, no accurate data exist in the United Kingdom on the actual incidence of severe head injury. By "severe" I mean that defined as causing post-traumatic amnesia of more than 24 hours. Evidence shows that the outcome of treatment of serious brain injury is far from optimum and is capable of improvement by way of increased personal independence and reduced job loss. However, those optimum outcomes tend to be available only as a result of prolonged intensive rehabilitation.

For more than 10 years a partnership of consultants and research scientists at Frenchay hospital and the Burden neurological hospital and institute have been working on designing a model service for brain injury management and rehabilitation. The model is based not only on information and advice from successful centres in the United States of America, other parts of Europe, Israel and Australasia and on wide consultation with professionals in rehabilitation of all kinds throughout the United Kingdom, but on a considerable body of personal experience built up in the district. The resulting service is, to say the least, impressive.

A few years ago, a layman such as I would not have thought possible the advances in medical science that the use of sophisticated computer techniques and advanced learning programmes, overlaid with the detailed experience in the treatment of brain injuries, have brought about. Links have been established with other local units in respect of particular elements in the treatment programme. For example, the Bristol royal infirmary conducts assessments and offers clinical follow-up facilities. There are also links with clinicians working with the brain-injured elsewhere in the south-west. So far,

however, facilities have not been developed in line with scientific advances, and the lack of any specialised in-patient rehabilitation facility has meant that the consultants and research scientists have not been able to achieve for the victims of brain injury what they know can be achieved and what international experience has shown can be achieved.

In 1989, Frenchay health authority applied for special medical development funding for a head injury rehabilitation service, but its bid was unsuccessful in competition with bids from other medical areas. I understand, however, that the Department is still interested in funding a model head injury rehabilitation service, and it is on that basis that the authority has prepared and submitted a further proposal.

The authority has proposed a centrally funded model brain injury rehabilitation service with independent scientific evaluation of its effects in terms of economic quality of life and cost-effectiveness over a five-year period. It is intended that initially the service will provide skilled treatment, rehabilitation and follow-up for all those with brain injuries in the northern part of the South West regional health authority area, but I am sure that many of the members of the team which has developed the service share my view that demand will rapidly stretch beyond the sub-regional area that it was originally intended to cover.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that, like recovery from brain injuries, their assessment and treatment is a slow process and that we should therefore need a minimum trial period of five years for the Department properly to investigate any system?

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend has hit on one of the most important aspects of the problem. The authority's proposal can be made to work only if it is allocated an appropriate trial period. The five-year period has been chosen because recovery is slow and the medical and social outcomes can be assessed only after a lengthy period has elapsed. A period of less than five years would fail to produce data of clinical value.

Mr. Jack Aspinwall (Wansdyke): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing an Adjournment debate on this important subject. Is he aware of the interesting situation that has developed in respect of Headway, an organisation which is very active in the Frenchay and Bristol areas, and which works hard to encourage the kind of project that he has proposed? I hope that my hon. Friend will take into account the many representations that have been made to him and to me. In the past few weeks, I have received more than 100 such representations from my constituents.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to an important aspect of the case. I applied for an Adjournment debate partly because, like him, I had received a large number of representations from families and friends of people who had suffered brain injuries, and who are aware of the scope for additional work to be done.

It is accepted in Frenchay's application that the service would not necessarily be restricted to the needs of the head-injured. Many of the techniques developed so far could be applied to other forms of disability such as severe encephalitis and the effects of anoxia. However, the service could not be adapted to meet the needs of patients who have suffered strokes or the victims of progressive neurological diseases, and it would be concerned, at least in its initial stages, with adults rather than with children.

Finally, I should mention that the proposal, once implemented and evaluated at the end of the five-year period, would ideally fit into the pattern of provision of service that will develop as a result of the Government's reforms. There is a clear intention that a properly evaluated service will be offered through the contracting system to purchasing health authorities not just in the sub-region but beyond it, and what I am therefore inviting my hon. Friend to consider this evening is a permanent addition to the range of services offered by the national health service which, once initially funded, will not require further special funding.

A consultant at the Burden neurological institute has drawn my attention to a paragraph in the original Beveridge report of 1942 which pointed out the need for a national health service to encourage rehabilitation, and which stated:

"Rehabilitation is a new field of remedial activity with great possibilities, but requiring expenditure of a different order of magnitude from that involved in the medical treatment of the nation".

I commend the proposal to my hon. Friend and look forward to his reply. First, however, I give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope).

11.50 pm

Mr. John Cope (Northavon): Frenchay hospital is situated in my constituency and in the past 16 years I have got to know it quite well. I know some of the consultants and other staff at the Frenchay and Burden hospitals who are involved in the treatment and rehabilitation of those with head injuries, about whom my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) has been speaking. The proposal that my hon. Friend has supported today has important potential which deserves the closest study from my hon. Friend the Minister. I am sure that he will look at it carefully and I hope that he will consider it sympathetically.

11.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on introducing this subject on the Adjournment. The idea that he has drawn to the attention of the House has clearly aroused considerable interest in the Bristol area. My hon. Friend is right to bring the matter to a wider audience because in so doing he draws attention to what I shall seek to demonstrate is recognised to be one area in the national health service in which further improvement is necessary. The proposal which has been prepared by the Frenchay district health authority and which my hon. Friend has espoused in this short debate suggests an interesting way forward, to which I hope to be able to respond in a friendly spirit, if not in a concretely positive spirit immediately.

My hon. Friend suggested that the Department should accept the proposal from the Frenchay health authority that a sub-regional brain injury rehabilitation unit should be developed in the authority, which would not only form the basis of improved care in the immediate area around Frenchay but could provide research and expertise that could be applied elsewhere in the health service. That is a powerful case, to which we react with interest, but also

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

recognising that, within the context of the health service, such a submission must always enter immediately into the competition for resources which is a necessary part of the management process.

In terms of our analysis of the problem, there is no difference between myself and my hon. Friends, or between myself and the Frenchay health authority. This is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed, and in bringing it to the attention of the House this evening my hon. Friend has done a service nor merely to the residents of Frenchay but to a wider audience.

I think that my hon. Friend would accept that he has been addressing the specific problem of rehabilitation after the immediate acute phase of treatment has been attended to. It is important to distinguish between the treatment of the acute condition and the post-acute rehabilitation service.

In the context of the acute care of people suffering from head injury, the health service has a good record. The victim of a motor accident or any other incident leading to serious injury can, in the immediate phase after the injury, expect from the national health service quality of care that is second to none. The care gives the patient a good chance to stabilise his condition and enter a rehabilitation phase. The immediate control of the acute symptoms of a head injury is something that the national health service does well, and that pattern repeats itself in the course of other treatments under the NHS. Treatment of acute-phase post-injury is of a high quality throughout the country.

The problem that my hon. Friend highlights relates not to the acute phase immediately after an accident, but the long-term rehabilitation when the patient's condition is stabilised and there is potential to set him on the road to recovery. As I have already acknowledged, that is where the record is less good. The problem is not purely esoteric, applying only to a small number of patients, but involves a significant part of health care provision. It is a serious problem, which each health authority should address.

My hon. Friend rightly said that statistics are unreliable, but such estimates as are available suggest that, in the average district health authority, there are each year 20 new cases of severe disability and 45 new cases of moderate disability arising from brain injury. Even after six months, five of the 20 severe cases and five of the 45 moderate ones still display substantial disability. The cumulative effect of that on the resident population in an average district health authority means that each authority contains between 250 and 350 survivors of accidents or other causes of brain injury with severe disability. In each health authority district, the problem is of substantial if not large proportions, and one that each authority must address.

Precisely because our care of the acute condition is relatively good, there has tended to be a rise in the number of those likely to benefit from the type of rehabilitation care for which my hon. Friend argued this evening. Therefore, the issue is not purely esoteric. Clearly, potential benefit is available if proper rehabilitation is provided because it is beyond dispute that, where that is provided, the improvement in the patient's condition can be considerable. When proper support is provided, it is possible to see dramatic transformations in the expectation of a patient and his carers and supporters in the immediate post-acute phase.

We acknowledge that the rehabilitation service falls below the aspirations that most of us have for it. It would be hard to do otherwise, because two recent reports, one from the Royal College of Physicians and the other from the Medical Disability Society, have drawn attention to the lack of specialist facilities for the rehabilitation of brain-injured patients and to the likelihood that they will find themselves in an inappropriate place for the care that they need. There is a risk that patients will find themselves in a mental handicap or mental illness hospital, or bed blocking in an acute hospital. None of these are proper places for high quality rehabilitation.

The two reports also highlighted deficiencies in the training of staff and drew attention to the lack of out-patient and day-patient facilities, so it is clear that the infrastructure of the rehabilitation service is not all that we should like it to be.

The news is not uniformly bad, however. There are places in the NHS, notably the Rivermead centre in Oxford, where there is high quality rehabilitation care. Some authorities use quite well-known facilities in the private sector to provide rehabilitation.

The Department has already taken some steps to try to improve basic provision, notably by providing funds for the charitable organisation that my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) mentioned: Headway. We also support the development of Oakwood house in Stockport and the work that it is doing in co-operation with the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. So we have supported the development of rehabilitation care facilities in the voluntary sector.

We recognise that further action is necessary. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West said, even in the days of Beveridge it was suggested that the NHS should be a three-legged stool—we should emphasise prevention and rehabilitation as well as treatment. The rehabilitation leg for brain-injured patients is not yet as good as we should like it to be.

What steps do the Government intend to take to put right this acknowledged weakness? We are considering whether to invite model schemes of the type that Frenchay has put forward. Before doing so, however, we should first consider how high a priority to attach to the rehabilitation of brain-injured patients in the health service. At any given moment, there are always opportunities to improve the quality of the health service, but any proposal to improve the rehabilitation of brain-injured patients will have to take its place in the competition for resources in any given year. It might be decided that it was a longer-term priority.

Our first decision, which we have not yet taken, is to determine whether the improvement of rehabilitation facilities for brain injured patients is a priority that we can tackle in the next financial year. If we decide to invite applications, we would invite from each health authority development schemes to treat brain-injured patients. If such an invitation is issued, I have no doubt that Frenchay would put forward its scheme. I have had a brief look at that scheme and, plainly, it has been well thought out. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West referred to its genealogy.

The scheme is well established and its ideas are the result of considerable background knowledge of the field. Therefore, it would be a strong runner, but it would not be

right for me to commit myself to accepting that proposal rather than one of the other runners that I have not yet had a chance to examine in the paddock. It is right to decide, first, whether the priority can be addressed next year. Secondly, if we decide to address it, we must ensure fair competition between the proposals that are submitted by health authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West has drawn attention to an important matter, and even if we do not address it next year, we shall clearly have to address it at some time. The proposal that he espoused is a useful contribution to the debate about precisely how services in that field should develop. When the Secretary of State is able to say that he intends to fund some model schemes, the Frenchay proposal will be considered seriously and sympathetically by whoever has the opportunity to improve facilities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Import and Export Control Act 1990.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 13 December 1990.

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 December 1990.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

1. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects inflation to fall below 5 per cent.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): The all-items RPI inflation is expected to fall to 5¼ per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1991. The Government's firm financial framework will ensure that inflation continues on a downward path.

Mr. Evans: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on having been elevated to one of the highest offices in the land and I suppose that we must hope that his economic forecasts will prove more successful than those of his two predecessors, who generally got it wrong. More seriously, does the Chancellor agree that if he succeeds in reducing the rate of inflation, he will do so through a policy of punishing interest rates which will deepen the current recession and create further unemployment? Will he give my constituents an assurance that unemployment will not rise above 2 million next year?

Mr. Lamont: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the first part of that supplementary question. The answer to the second part is that there is no painless or easy way to reduce inflation, although that is an illusion peddled by the Labour party. The costs and pain of reducing inflation now will be as nothing compared with the pain and costs that we had in reducing the inflation that we inherited in 1980-81.

Sir William Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members join in congratulating him on his promotion to Chancellor of the Exchequer and we are absolutely certain that he will continue with the same economic policy as his predecessor? If public expenditure were increased to implement the various promises that Labour Members are putting forward, what effect does he think that that would have not only on the inflation rate but on the budget deficit?

Mr. Lamont: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks and I assure him that economic policy continues to be the same. I also assure him that I shall take no risks either with inflation or with the exchange rate. Bearing down on inflation is, and will remain, the Government's top priority. My right hon. Friend is right to point to the extravagant plans for public expenditure put forward by the Labour party, which could have only two consequences—even higher interest rates and accelerating inflation.

Mr. John Smith: May I add my congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer? Will he now answer the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) about unemployment? If the recession continues, as it is clearly doing, causing a downturn in economic activity, the collapse of companies and a rise in unemployment, what action will the Government take to combat those deplorable results?

Mr. Lamont: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his first remarks. There are many pleasures in holding my present office, one of which is having the right hon. and learned Gentleman opposite me. We intend to make the reduction of inflation our top priority. We do not intend to boost output by adjusting fiscal policy. In the past that has been a counter-productive policy and has brought no benefits in terms of reducing inflation. The benefits to output will come when inflation is reduced. The experience of previous cycles has been that once we make marked progress in reducing inflation, output begins to recover.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our present predicament stems largely from the mistaken decision to relax monetary policy at the end of 1987? That is clear with the benefit of hindsight. Will my right hon. Friend confirm, however, that Labour Members were urging us to go still further and that what they advocate today shows that they have learnt nothing since then?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am confident that we shall make progress in lowering inflation as a result of the tough and difficult decisions taken by my predecessor. The success that we shall have owes nothing to any encouragement from Labour Members, who have done nothing but oppose every policy designed to lower inflation.

Balance of Payments

2. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the balance of payment figures.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): In the latest three months, the current account deficit was £3·1 billion—roughly half the peak recorded in the third quarter of 1989. It is likely to continue to fall as domestic demand pressures ease further.

Mr. Taylor: Does the Treasury team think that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was, and is, correct in believing that the deficit is self-correcting and not a matter for Government action, or do they agree with the new Prime Minister that the deficit is a problem and, if so, what do they intend to do to reduce it further?

Mr. Mellor: I do not think that there is any great divide between my two right hon. Friends. On the contrary, it has been a commonplace of Government policy for a long time, and continues to be, that the deficit must be reduced, which it is being. We are confident that we shall meet the targets that we set.

Mr. John Townend: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his promotion and I trust that he will bring his undoubted enthusiasm to keeping Government expenditure under control. What effect do Britain's contributions to the EC, overseas aid and the cost of the Rhine Army have on the balance of payments, and what plans do the Government have to reduce that burden on the British taxpayer and reduce the balance of payments deficit?

Mr. Mellor: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. The three policy issues that he identifies are ones to which the Government have commitments, which will be honoured.

Mr. Madden: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that a large chunk of Britain's trade deficit is made up of imported textiles and clothing? Does he appreciate that there will be an explosion of anger from the men and women whose livelihoods depend on the British textile and clothing industry if today, in a desperate effort to salvage the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks, their jobs are traded off and British industry is sold down the river?

Mr. Mellor: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. A balance has to be struck between the interests of industry and those of the consumer. I see no reason why the livelihoods of the people about whom the hon. Gentleman is quite properly concerned should be put at risk by the discussions. There are some encouraging signs that the level of imports is no greater now than 12 months ago and exports, particularly manufacturing exports, have been keeping up well, with an increase of about 7·5 per cent. this year. That suggests that there is no reason for doom and gloom in the textile and clothing industry or any other.

Mr. Marlow: Would my right hon. and learned Friend be kind enough to explain what is meant by the "balancing item." Apparently, the published balance of trade figures are nothing like so bad as they were set out to be because of this thing called the balancing item. What is the reality?

Mr. Mellor: The balancing item is where the figures cannot be reconciled—*[Interruption.]* That is what they tell me. If I may be permitted to do so, I was about to display further erudition. The balancing item probably reflects the problems of monitoring capital inflows when, in today's world, capital inflows flow in and out without the regulations of yesterday. That is almost certainly the case, but the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will correct me if I am wrong.

Departments (Expenditure)

3. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Departments are planned to have less money in real terms in 1993-94 than their planned expenditure for 1991-92

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 1A.10 of the 1990 autumn statement.

Mr. Steinberg: Does the Chief Secretary agree that the Government plan to spend less in real terms on education in 1983-84 than in the previous year? If so, was not it a hollow promise for the Prime Minister to claim that he was interested in education and attached priority to it? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that extra resources are put into the education budget, if only to save the face of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Mellor: I think that the hon. Gentleman meant 1993-94——

Mr. Steinberg *indicated assent.*

Mr. Mellor: I say that just to show that I was listening.

A substantial increase for education for next year was announced in the autumn statement. The final figures for the third year are always considered in the public expenditure survey negotiations immediately preceding the autumn statement of the November before April 1993, so we must see what the circumstances are then.

One of the points that need to be borne in mind about education in recent times is the fall in the number of school age pupils. The key indicator is expenditure per pupil, which under this Government has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms for secondary school pupils, and that trend is set to continue.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the two Departments that have done well out of the autumn statement are the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Science, and that that shows the Government's commitment to helping people in the community who most need assistance when inflation is running at current levels? Is not that a sign of a caring Government?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend is right. I have already made the point about education and I should like to add that the budget for health for next year was increased in the autumn statement by about £3 billion, which means an increase over two years of £6 billion. I am not sure what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and his colleagues will find to complain about in that.

Mrs. Beckett: I, too, congratulate the new Chief Secretary on his appointment. We were also pleased to

learn that the new Chancellor told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that he thinks that the Government should look after manufacturing industry. How do the Government reconcile that with the fact that their spending plans show that over the planning period, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, the Government intend to cut spending in real terms not only on education but on the work of the Department of Trade and Industry, on research and development, and even on training to reduce the skill shortages that are feeding inflation? Or is it just that there is no relationship between what the Government say and what they do?

Mr. Mellor: I think that the hon. Lady's problem is more fundamental. She seems to think that the only way to assist manufacturers is to spend Government money on them, when it is the framework in which manufacturing industry has to operate which is the key. It was the improvement in that framework which led to massive increases in productivity and manufacturing output in the 1980s, and the same improvement will ensure that manufacturing comes through the present difficult period and goes on to further success.

The hon. Lady will be aware that it is no freak occurrence—although it did not occur at all under Labour Governments—that under this Government our share of world trade is increasing.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for the massive increases proposed for transport, particularly for London Regional Transport. May I look forward to the day when that beneficence expands to include improving the Northern line?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He recognises that about £700 million has been made available for rail and underground improvements to benefit major parts of London's network. I will ensure that his views on the Northern line are passed on to London Regional Transport. It is a great myth that there is under-investment, as British Rail and London Underground will be spending about £750 million in the next three years on safety alone. That shows just how much investment is going into public transport.

Supply Side Policies

4. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures were announced in the autumn statement to help improve the supply side of the United Kingdom economy.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): The Government's supply side policies are designed to improve the performance of the economy by removing barriers and creating incentives.

Mr. Fraser: Given that unemployment is rising rapidly, that we continue to have a horrific deficit in trade in manufactured goods and that industrial investment is still only at the same level as it was in 1979, are not those measures wholly inadequate to enable us to produce from our own resources the things that people in this country need?

Mr. Maples: That is absolutely wrong. It completely ignores the fact that during the 1980s the United Kingdom was top of the league for productivity, top of the league for growth, top of the league for investment and created 2¼ million more jobs, so we must have been doing something right.

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the improvements in the supply side of the economy have been most satisfactory under the Government? Does he further agree that the low rates of direct taxation have contributed towards making sure that the labour market has settled down and fewer strikes have helped to free productivity and improve the supply side of the economy?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend is quite right. Our supply side policies have been designed to improve competition, remove barriers and improve incentives. We have done that by cutting tax, deregulating the economy, improving competition and reforming the labour market. To me, and to many of my hon. Friends, it is laughable to suggest that there is such a thing as supply side socialism.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: As the latest figures show a serious financial deficit among large companies in Britain and it is therefore plain that those companies will reduce investment, will the Minister further consider an increase in capital allowances, possibly a short-term one, to encourage continued investment?

Mr. Maples: On the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, many companies have substantial debts because they have been investing on an unprecedented scale in the past few years. The right hon. Gentleman also asked about depreciation and capital allowances. As he knows, we reformed corporation tax in 1984. There is now a generous system for depreciation and capital allowances and the accumulation of those 25 per cent. allowances over the past few years has meant that many companies are protected from a large amount of what would otherwise be corporation tax liability.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend confirm the Government's commitment to encouraging further savings so that investment in industry can expand in the 1990s in the same way as it expanded in the 1980s under the Government's policies?

Mr. Maples: I can assure my hon. Friend of that. Both of the last two Budgets have contained measures designed to encourage savings. They have been very successful, and we hope that they will enable industry to continue to fund the kind of investment programmes that it has funded for the past few years when, as I have said, we saw record growth in business investment.

Taxes and National Insurance

5. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross earnings a married couple with one earner on 75 per cent. of average earnings, with two children, paid in all taxes and national insurance, including local taxes and treating child benefit as negative income tax, in 1978-79 and 1989-90.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): Approximately 31 per cent. and 33 per cent., respectively; over the same period, measured at 1990 prices, the same family has enjoyed an increase in real net income of nearly £43 per week.

Dr. Moonie: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new job. We have crossed swords before in Select Committees and in various other places, and I am sure that we shall do so again. I am glad that she has confirmed the figures. Will she confirm that the net result of the Government's taxation policy over the past 11 years has been to reduce taxes for the rich and to increase them for the poor?

Mrs. Shephard: What counts for families are real earnings. The total tax burden in all cases is now lower than it would have been if Labour's tax regime had simply been indexed for inflation. That same family which has enjoyed a rise of £43 per week under this Government would have had a measly £3·20 under Labour.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is not one of the most pernicious barriers—the trade barrier—equally damaging to the rich and to the poor? Does my hon. Friend agree that even if we get a 30 per cent. cut in food subsidies under the GATT round, every family in Britain will pay more in increased food prices as a result of trade barriers than they pay in the poll tax? *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend should also bear in mind the extra costs caused by trade barriers in relation to cars and consumer electronics. Is it not time that the Government started to take those issues seriously?

Mrs. Shephard: It was a touch difficult to hear the whole of my hon. Friend's question, but I assure him that the issues that he raises about the GATT round are taken very seriously by the Government.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I welcome the hon. Lady to her new job and invite her to win the support of the House by repudiating the policy adopted by her predecessor of refusing to give the House the figures for the distributional effect of the poll tax on the tax burden. Does the hon. Lady understand that such a refusal completely undermines the initiative taken by the Secretary of State for the Environment yesterday? The Treasury team can take campaigning against that right hon. Gentleman a little too far. Is not the truth of the matter that the Treasury has the figures and is concealing them because their effect is deeply embarrassing to the Government?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) for their kind welcome. I remind the hon. Gentleman that nothing is ruled out and nothing is ruled in. The figures are not available. The increased burden on families from the community charge has been the result of Labour-controlled local authorities spending well in excess of appropriate levels. I remind him that at least 10 million people get help through community charge benefit.

Mr. Conway: It is delightful to see my hon. Friend at the Dispatch Box today in that capacity. She is there because of her ability and not because of her gender. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members should listen to this—they might enjoy it. Is not it the case that four out of five families with children of school age pay direct taxation? Does my hon. Friend think that they would be happier to have the high spending plans and taxation policies of the Labour party?

Mrs. Shephard: I am not sure whether to thank my hon. Friend for his obviously well-intentioned welcome to the Dispatch Box. I will make no comment on the gender-oriented remark. Of course people prefer to have a cut in direct taxation.

Hard Ecu

6. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to modify his hard ecu scheme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The United Kingdom proposals for a hard ecu have been widely welcomed as a positive contribution to the ongoing debate on EMU. The ideas first put forward by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will continue to be developed and discussed with European Community colleagues.

Mr. Beith: I congratulate the Chancellor on his appointment and remind him that one of his first tasks will be to convince the Rome conference that there is still life in the hard ecu scheme. Does he agree that he will have to satisfy two conditions to do that? He will have to demonstrate, first, that the scheme can lead directly to single currency and then that the institution running the currency will not be subject to political interference in its responsibility for price stability. Are those conditions acceptable to the Chancellor and to the Prime Minister?

Mr. Lamont: On the hon. Gentleman's point about how independent a European monetary institution should be, he is not correct. There are a variety of views and not all countries are in favour of fully independent institutions. For example, the French take a different view from the Germans. A number of countries have expressed interest in the hard ecu and the hon. Gentleman may have noticed that the French Finance Minister, Mr. Bérégovoy has said that he thinks that the full potential of the hard ecu should be explored as a contribution towards stage 2. We have said that the hard ecu could, in time and if people and markets wish it, evolve towards a single currency, but only on that basis—that individuals chose so to do.

Mr. Dykes: I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on his first appearance as Chancellor. Will he confirm that the hard ecu proposals can fit felicitously into the longer-term EMU objectives? Will he remind the House that the European central bank proposals being worked out also include the full involvement of all the national central banks?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is right on the last point. On Sunday, I discussed those very issues both with other Finance Ministers and with the governors of the banks of Europe. On the first point, I have made the position clear. We see that it could evolve, but this is an approach that is market driven and involves individuals choosing how the monetary system of Europe should develop.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Chancellor share the view of his Financial Secretary, who told the House of Lords Select Committee on 9 October that in his view the hard ecu could lead to a single currency even more quickly than the Delors programme, or the view of the Prime Minister, who told the House on 30 October that the hard ecu would not be widely used in any case and therefore could not lead to a single currency? Does the Chancellor back his Minister, or the back-seat driver? What is his view?

Mr. Lamont: In putting that question, the hon. Gentleman shows that he does not understand the hard ecu proposal at all. We have repeatedly made it clear that what the hard ecu would ultimately lead to would depend on what individuals and markets decide. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the

Financial Secretary have expressed their views about the speed at which any change might happen and it is perfectly in keeping with the theme of letting people choose the hard ecu that those different views should be expressed.

Mr. Favell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday the French Finance Minister, whom he has just mentioned, said that the move towards economic and monetary union can be achieved only by the simultaneous erection of an economic Government? Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Lamont: We have always feared that an imposed single currency and an early imposition of monetary union must lead to a degree of political integration for which I do not believe the people on the continent of Europe are ready.

Intergovernmental Conferences

7. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what work he is undertaking in preparing for the intergovernmental conference in December.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put forward proposals for a hard ecu and European Monetary Fund, for which I shall be arguing at the intergovernmental conference on EMU. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has put forward suggestions for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Community in the context of the intergovernmental conference on institutional reform and he is working up those ideas in preparation for that conference.

Mr. Sedgemore: I ask the Chancellor again: does he intend to reaffirm the support that he gave just two weeks ago to the Bruges group of anti-European Tory Members of Parliament or, having no further use for their votes, does he intend to repudiate their views at the intergovernmental conference? Bearing in mind the fact that his Financial Secretary now says that we can move speedily towards the creation of a single European currency through the hard ecu, what will happen to notes in circulation when he abolishes the pound?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his close study of the speech that I made two weeks ago. He has asked me about it not just today but four times yesterday at the Select Committee. My answer today is no different from my answer yesterday, and that is that the speech that I gave then was in accordance with Government policy and remains so today.

Mr. David Howell: I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his assumption of the high office of Chancellor. He has our very warm support. Is not the point about the hard ecu that it is, unlike the present ecu, a currency that has to be managed, and will be managed by a new institution, the European Monetary Fund? Is not it the case, therefore, that once the processes of management develops, it will give markets, customers, individuals and Governments the opportunity to choose whether, in the years ahead, we wish to move to a single currency, enlarging our choice and making it more important?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He is right and expresses the point well. The hard ecu is not a single currency—it is a common currency and it differs, as he says, from the existing ecu in that it is not just a basket currency; it will be a hard counter-inflationary currency, and it will be up to individuals and markets to choose. In that way, the development of monetary union would, if it happened, be entirely evolutionary and in accordance with people's choice.

Mr. Molyneaux: I congratulate the Chancellor on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends on this Bench. Now that most of the 11 have started to wriggle out of the commitment to a single currency, will the Chancellor undertake to uphold the freedom and the decision-making power of the Treasury, over which he now presides?

Mr. Lamont: That is very much our objective.

Mr. Aitken: Will my right hon. Friend, far from repudiating his excellent speech to the Bruges group two weeks ago, take note that the European institutions seem to have read it carefully and moved in his direction—particularly in respect of that part of my right hon. Friend's speech in which he said that economic convergence among member states is a mirage? Does he welcome the apparent change of mood before the forthcoming intergovernmental conferences, at which uniformity will no longer be demanded but instead there will be new emphasis on two-speed or even multi-speed progress towards economic and monetary union?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There is a wide variety of growth and inflation rates in the European economy, and a number of member states now acknowledge that one cannot move to a single currency without first achieving much closer convergence than currently exists.

Tax Avoidance

8. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to prevent tax avoidance.

Mr. Maples: The Government have introduced several measures to limit the scope for tax avoidance and are prepared to introduce further measures as and when necessary.

Mr. Wardell: What is the estimated total loss of tax revenues to the Exchequer through artful dodgers using offshore trusts as a way of avoiding tax?

Mr. Maples: By the very nature of the tax avoidance mechanism to which the hon. Gentleman refers, it is impossible to make such an estimate. We blocked up some loopholes in the Finance Act 1981, but others remain. All questions of tax avoidance are under constant review. Labour tabled a new clause to this year's Finance Bill that would have dealt with one minor aspect, but it is a complex matter. I am advised that simply to introduce an exit charge on trusts to foreign jurisdictions would involve more than six pages of legislation.

Mr. Hannam: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most effective way of reducing tax avoidance is to lower general taxation, which is something that Labour never understands?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend is completely right. One reason why Britain has such a widespread and

sophisticated tax avoidance industry is the ridiculously high marginal rates that we suffered under a Labour Government.

Small Companies (VAT)

9. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance he is providing to small companies for the collection and payment of value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Small businesses are able to take advantage of special facilities for dealing with VAT, including the cash and annual accounting schemes and particular schemes for retailers.

Mr. Morley: What help will the Minister give to well-established and respected firms such as Multiflex in my constituency, which is being surcharged £30,000 at the 25 per cent. rate as a consequence of the problems that it is experiencing in obtaining payments from its customers in the construction industry? The Minister will appreciate that such companies cannot lean on valued customers and that many of their problems have been created by the high interest rates that flow from Government policies. Given the poor state of the economic climate, should not the Government allow more flexibility and help rather than hinder small businesses?

Mrs. Shephard: Some smaller firms dependent on bank borrowing are experiencing difficulties and I greatly regret that. I believe that the hon. Gentleman was referring to the serious misdeclaration penalty. The company that he mentioned can give reasonable excuse to satisfy Customs or the VAT tribunal and I advise the company to take that action.

Mr. Bellingham: I add my congratulations to those already expressed to my hon. Friend on her excellent promotion. She will be aware, as she represents a neighbouring constituency to mine, that firms in west Norfolk are pleased about the recent increase in the VAT threshold. Does she agree that Customs and Excise must show the utmost sensitivity and understanding in erasing arrears incurred by small firms?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind welcome. The Government will continue to examine ways in which procedures can be simplified and we shall of course deal sympathetically with companies of the type that he described.

Economic Performance

10. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss Britain's economic performance.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor expects to meet the Governor of the Bank of England from time to time to discuss a variety of matters.

Mr. Bell: May I congratulate the right hon. and learned Gentleman on his elevation to the Cabinet? Having sat with him through proceedings on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Children Act 1989, I can well understand and appreciate his grasp of detail. Will he confirm that he will need that grasp when he considers the inflation rate of 10·9 per cent., as opposed to that of our European partners, which is half that rate, and when he sees that unemployment is rising for the seventh consecutive month, that our interest rates are the highest of all of the Group of Seven industrial countries, and that bankruptcies are 90 per cent. up on this period last year? Will not that give food for sombre thought when the Chancellor next meets the Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his typically generous words at the beginning of his questions. He has obviously chosen some statistics, but there are plenty of others that pay testimony to the real and sustained improvement in the British economy and in British industrial performance in the past decade. I shall try to be up on all of them.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. and learned Friend report to the Governor of the Bank of England that there is growing support throughout the House for greater independence for the bank and that those arguments exist independent of whether there is any sort of monetary union?

Mr. Mellor: I am aware that there are those who hold that view—I think that quite a lot of other people hold a contrary view. It is by no means demonstrable that a more independent bank would enable the British economy to function more effectively. For instance, the Bank of Japan is one of the least independent banks in the world.

Mr. Boateng: What action do the Government and the Bank of England propose to take to sort out the appalling mess surrounding "swaps" and to prevent any future repetition of that sort of affair in the interests of the City's international reputation?

Mr. Mellor: That matter is under consideration and we are awaiting reports on it. I cannot add anything to that.

Mr. Devlin: What discussions has my right hon. and learned Friend had with the Governor, as the Bank of England is the sole bank of issue south of the Scottish border, about printing its ecu value on one side of a £1 note? If he has had such discussions, will he ask the Governor of the Bank of England for an undertaking that, if such an endorsement is made on every note printed by the bank, the words "Stockton-on-Tees" will not be removed from the back of a £5 note?

Mr. Mellor: With respect to my hon. Friend, the issue of European monetary union is rather more fundamental than what is printed on a note, but I shall bear that matter in mind when we have our future discussions.

Indirect Tax

11. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their disposable income the bottom quintile group of non-retired households, ranked by original income, paid in total in indirect tax in 1987; and what proportion the top quintile paid using the same method as in "Economic Trends", December 1988.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Calculating the figures on the basis requested, the relevant proportions are 29·4 per cent. for the bottom quintile and 19·2 per cent. for the top quintile.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does not the Government's record on the amount of direct and indirect taxation paid by some of

the poorest members of our community contrast remarkably with the new Prime Minister's professed aim to establish a classless society? Is not it a fact that the Government's policies have set out deliberately to widen the gap between the richest and the poorest?

Mrs. Shephard: The fact is that real take-home pay levels have increased under this Government for every income group, and real take-home pay is what matters.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that because real take-home pay has increased for the people of the United Kingdom, not least for the people of Scotland —where there are more people in work today than at any time in history—they are now able to spend their money as they wish and to enjoy holidays abroad, which their parents never even dreamed of?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fact is that people have more choice in the way in which they spend their money, and indirect taxes take up broadly the same proportion of household expenditure for households on all levels of income. That is why the Government have chosen to shift some of the burden from direct to indirect taxation.

Taxes and National Insurance

12. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent forecast for the proportion of non-oil gross domestic product that taxes and national insurance contributions will represent in 1990-91.

Mr. Maples: The figure is 37¼ per cent.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister confirm that, in the year 1978-79, the figure was only 34 per cent? While we appreciate that the Government have reduced personal income tax, that has tended to benefit the rich and in the past 10 years the overall tax burden has increased. Is not that rather different from the impression that the Government tend to give the country?

Mr. Maples: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman admits that we have reduced the burden of income tax. What his question left out was the fact that in 1978-79 the Labour Government were running a public sector borrowing requirement amounting to 5½ per cent. of gross domestic product. If that is added to the tax burden, the total comes to over 40 per cent., as against the present figure of under 37 per cent. If our public sector borrowing requirement were now at the same level as it was then, it would be £30 billion.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend accept that what matters to ordinary families is how much money they have, and that that aspect has improved? Does he agree that tax receipts are affected by tax expenditures and that a couple with a mortgage and above-average earnings will continue to receive the equivalent of 12 child benefits? Perhaps the Department of Social Security and the Inland Revenue could get together and concentrate as much on that as they have on the level of child allowance and child benefits.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend is quite right: what matters to most families is the amount of their take-home pay. Under the present Government, the take-home pay of a person on average earnings has risen by more than 30 per cent., or the equivalent of £58 a week. Under the previous Labour Government, it rose by 1 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ms. Quin: Does the Prime Minister recall that only two days ago he appealed to his party to close ranks? Can he explain why so many of his colleagues refused to support him in the poll tax debate last night? Can he also explain why the British people, many of whom have suffered hardship as a result of this tax, should be expected to have any confidence in the Conservative party, when it is now clear that Tory Members who originally voted to impose the poll tax on us clearly did not believe in it all along?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is slightly mistaken. A large number of my ministerial and Back-Bench colleagues were abroad unpaired yesterday, and my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip saw no need to bring them back, because we are united.

Mr. Holt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that it has not gone unnoticed on Teesside and in the north-east that, on Tuesday night, he supported the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill in the Lobby, and that the Leader of the Opposition did not oppose it? My right hon. Friend will be most welcome throughout the north-east when he makes his frequent visits—unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who has occasionally dropped in on the Durham miners' gala and then scarpered back to the south.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I look forward to visiting Langbaurgh and the north-east on many occasions.

Mr. Kinnock: When he knows what he knows, why does the Prime Minister refuse to abolish the poll tax now?

The Prime Minister: Unlike the right hon. Gentleman and his party—who have, on the latest count, changed their policy on this matter on 52 occasions—we are conducting a comprehensive review to determine how best to deal with it.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister confirm for the British people that the poll tax will still be in place at the time of the next general election?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made it perfectly clear yesterday that we were undertaking a fundamental review, and a fundamental review is what we shall undertake. We shall see how long that will take. I think that the country will notice that, although he professes to oppose the system, the right hon. Gentleman will make no constructive moves towards a constructive dialogue to correct it.

Mr. Kinnock: When the right hon. Gentleman's proposal last night did not even convince his hon. Friends, how does he seriously expect it to convince anybody else? Will he now answer the question? Will he confirm that the poll tax will still be in place at the next general election —yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might confirm that he has made it clear that under his plans the time scale for change may be considerable.

Mr. Fishburn: Will my right hon. Friend win the hearts of Londoners today by endorsing the proposals for leasehold reform put forward last week by the Lord Chancellor? Does he accept that the draft Bill for commonhold will allow London flat dwellers to own their flats on freehold for the first time, thereby ending the injustices of leasehold that make so many London flat dwellers into second-class home owners?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, over the past 10 years we have done more to increase owner-occupation, with the personal security that that offers, than any previous Government. It is noticeable that that is not the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister realise that we welcome the proposal made last night for discussions with Opposition parties on a replacement for the poll tax? My party will contribute constructively to those discussions. We shall not play parliamentary games while millions out there are suffering from the effects of this unjust tax. In that context, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to remember the promise that he made in his 1974 election address, in which he said that he would abolish the rates——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that we need visual aids.

Mr. Ashdown: —in which he said that he would abolish the rates——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman can make his point without the visual signs.

Mr. Ashdown: He said that he would abolish the rates and replace them with a tax related to the ability to pay. Does he still agree with that and does he realise that the only tax properly related to ability to pay is a local income tax?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, the right hon. Gentleman knows that we are considering local taxation at the moment. On the first point, I share what I think is implicit in what the right hon. Gentleman said, which is that the House of Commons need not necessarily be a perpetual cockpit of confrontation. I regret very much that Labour Members, despite all that they said, have no intention of helping to determine common principles for the role of local government. If they do not wish to do so, that is a matter for them, but others will.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Michael Lord. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] Order.

Mr. Lord: As our new Prime Minister will have considerably fewer problems to deal with on taking over his appointment, may I urge him to bring to the top of the list the problem of haemophiliacs who have been infected with the AIDS virus through no fault of their own? He would earn the undying gratitude of the victims, their families and the House if he could take steps to bring about an out-of-court settlement as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has made it clear that we are spending a considerable amount of money to deal with that problem, which we shall continually keep under review.

Q2. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Prime Minister aware that in the past 12 months a baby has been abducted from a hospital in London, an 11-year-old girl has been raped at a hospital in Surrey, a 77-year-old woman has been indecently assaulted at a hospital in Leeds and last week two doctors were murdered at a hospital in Wakefield? As the Government are committed to spending about £200 million on allowing hospitals to opt out, but a mere £20,000 on hospital security, does the Prime Minister feel that he has his priorities right?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should bear it in mind that the direct management of hospitals lies with health authorities and, in the case of national health service trusts, with the management of those trusts in due course. I am sure that they will take note of what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there would be almost universal delight and gratitude if, before Christmas, the problem of the haemophilia AIDS victims were solved by adequate compensation being paid without liability being admitted?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we have already made a payment into the Macfarlane Trust. I understand the sensitive nature of the matter, but I have nothing further to add today.

Q3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Prime Minister aware that of the 181 children who left Pennywell comprehensive school in my constituency earlier this year, only 10 found some form of employment, 32 went on to higher education, and of the remaining 150 or so, half went on to Government training schemes, which will lead to the dole, and the other half went directly on to the dole? What hope can he offer the children of Sunderland that life in John Major's Britain will be any different from life in Margaret Thatcher's Britain?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been considerable improvements in every aspect of life in the past 10 years, and that will continue. On the specific point that he made, a larger percentage of our youngsters now go on to further education than ever before, a higher percentage of our population is in work than ever before and there is a higher level of opportunities

and training than ever before. That bodes well for the young people of Sunderland and indeed for young people everywhere.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that many local education authorities, including mine of Kirklees, are holding back far more of their education budgets for central administration than was originally intended by the Government? As the Government have announced that they intend to carry out a full review of the structure of local government, does he think that we should consider taking the control of education out of the hands of local education authorities and giving it to schools?

The Prime Minister: I have considerable sympathy with that point of view, not least because of the enormous success of local management of schools. I hope that education authorities will release as much money as possible to go directly into the classroom.

Q4. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Will the Prime Minister tell us whether, as a result of the frantic trawling for options and ideas that is under way in the Department of the Environment, there will be any reduction whatsoever in the poll tax bills that people will receive in April, or will the amounts be precisely the same as they were always going to be?

The Prime Minister: As for trawling for options, I remind the hon. Gentleman that his party has had 52 changes of mind on local government. That is not so much a U-turn as a merry-go-round.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that manufacturing industry is the only genuine source of non-inflationary growth and that the continuing use of high interest rates is damaging to investment and to competitiveness? Will my right hon. Friend look again at an alternative industrial manufacturing strategy?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, the central core of economic policy is to bear down on inflation. As it reduces—and I expect that it will reduce, which is the general view of external commentators as well—the options may exist for a reduction in interest rates. I can give no indication of when that may be.

Q5. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister agree that given that two of the Polaris submarines are no longer seaworthy and that the other two were on the Clyde earlier this week, he is the first Prime Minister for 20 years not to have had a nuclear deterrent at his fingertips? Does he further agree that that did not cause him or the country any problems? Will he now agree that, rather than trying to patch up the remaining Polaris submarines, he should abandon the whole programme and give a clear lead to the non-proliferation talks in January that we want to have a non-nuclear world?

The Prime Minister: Our nuclear capacity remains a deterrent and remains an important part of our defence.

Sir Robert McCrindle: As my former area Whip—which until now has, no doubt, been his greatest claim to distinction—will my right hon. Friend comment on the possibility of some change being brought to the hours that the House works? Will he tell me why, having had that matter raised on many occasions in the 20 years in which I have been in the House, I remain sceptical? What can my right hon. Friend do to reassure me?

The Prime Minister: I have fond memories of being my hon. Friend's Whip some years ago. The hours of work in the House are essentially a matter for the Procedure Committee and for hon. Members themselves. Each will have his own individual views. If the House were to express views, I do not think that I would stand against them.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House please tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Road Traffic Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means will name opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on the Gulf crisis on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion to amend schedule 1 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975.

WEDNESDAY 12 DECEMBER—Opposition Day (2nd Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Deepening Economic Recession".

Motion to take note of EC document relating to non-standard employment. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion to take note of EC document relating to a research and development programme on information technology. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER—Estimates Day (1st Allotted Day) (first part). There will be a debate on class IV, vote 2, Department of Trade and Industry, so far as it relates to investigations under the Companies Act and the Financial Services Act.

There will be a debate on fisheries on a Government motion.

At 10 o'clock, the House will be asked to agree the civil and defence votes on account and the outstanding winter supplementary estimates.

FRIDAY 14 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on Her Majesty's Government's progress in assisting economic reform and addressing environment and population issues in the developing world, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 17 DECEMBER—Proceedings in Committee on the Criminal Justice Bill on new clauses relating to capital punishment.

The House will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, I now propose that the House should rise for the Christmas Adjournment on Thursday 20 December until Monday 14 January.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that that bit of good news will enable us to make progress.

[Wednesday 12 December 1991
(1) Relevant European Community Documents
6864/90 Information Technology Research
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxx (1989-90) para 1

(2) Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 8072/90, (b) 9601/90 } Non-standard Work
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 11-xxxii (1989-90) para 1
(b) None yet reported on.]

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Clearly, it would be totally inappropriate for me to criticise the Leader of the House about the length of the Christmas parliamentary recess. However, it is much longer than it would normally be. If there are any serious developments in the Gulf crisis, the Opposition would expect Parliament to be recalled, especially if any conflict were to develop.

Will the Leader of the House say whether it is his intention to meet his obligations under the Standing Orders and proceed to set up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? Is it not the case that, if any other hon. Member were in persistent conflict with the Standing Orders, action would be taken to correct the behaviour of that hon. Member? Although it is very unusual for the Leader of the House to be in persistent conflict with our Standing Orders, that realistically and accurately is the position in which the right hon. Gentleman now finds himself. He has a duty to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, and we urge him now to carry it out.

Will the Leader of the House confirm that, for the second time in this Parliament, we are to vote on the restoration of capital punishment? Is it not within the memory of the whole House that his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, when Home Secretary, indicated to the House that our previous decision on capital punishment would deal with that matter for this Parliament? Is it not clear that that was just a rash promise made at the Tory party conference and that that is the only reason why the matter is to come before the House?

Can we expect a debate on revenue support grant before Christmas? It is an important matter for all hon. Members, their constituents and local authorities. Will the Leader of the House ensure that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment makes a report so that we can have the earliest possible indication of the poll tax levels that our constituents will have to face next year? When the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) makes that statement, will he explain to the House why, on 16 December 1987, during the Second Reading debate on the poll tax Bill, when I proposed on behalf of the Opposition that we should seek consensus on local government finance, the right hon. Member for Henley, who spoke immediately after me, rejected it outright and said that there was no hope of a consensus from Conservative Members? What has happened to make him change his mind?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my announcement on the recess will be welcomed by the whole House. It is not wholly right to say that it is much longer than usual. It is certainly longer than last year's, but the Session started two weeks later last year. I know that there is concern, as was expressed during Prime Minister's Question Time, about the hours of the House. It is true that we work very long hours in the House. I hope that the announcement about the slightly longer break from parliamentary duties in the House will be welcomed.

The hon. Gentleman requested that Parliament be recalled in the event of serious developments in the Gulf. Obviously I take serious note of that point and I understand why he made it.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I have little to add to what I said earlier, except that having looked again at the matter I am convinced that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make further progress on that matter in the coming Session. As the hon. Gentleman will know, many other opportunities are available, including the Scottish Grand Committee and Select Committees, for hon. Members to question Scottish Ministers on Scottish matters. Many of the relevant Scottish Members of Parliament have many other parliamentary commitments.

As for the debate on capital punishment, it is in order for new clauses and amendments to be tabled to the present Criminal Justice Bill, and indeed one such new clause has already been tabled to that Bill for consideration in Standing Committee. We took the view that it would be right to enable the whole House to express its view on any such new clauses and amendments, and that is why we are taking the matter as part of the deliberations of the Committee of the whole House. I believe that that is what the House wants and that that course will be for the convenience of hon. Members. I have also put down a business motion to enable all new clauses and amendments thereto which are tabled by 12 December to be taken so that we may have a full and proper debate on the matter, and I believe that that is what the House would want.

As for revenue support grant, the hon. Gentleman will know that consultations on the Government's proposals were completed on 28 November. I know that it is the intention of the Secretary of State for the Environment to lay the orders shortly, but it may be for the convenience of the House if I say now that they will not be debated before the Christmas recess.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Today, in the subsequent debate on the EEC, no fewer than 30 right hon. and hon. Members will be seeking to participate, and it will probably be necessary for me to put a 10-minute limit on speeches. I ask hon. Members who are now asking business questions to confine their questions to the business for next week, and not make speeches which they might otherwise make on other occasions.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Has my right hon. Friend seen early-day motion 36 in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), myself and 172 other hon. Members concerning the serious problems of algae in our rivers and the need for a Bill to get phosphates out of household detergents?

[That this House expresses its concern that, in addition to Rutland Water, some 501 rivers, lakes and waterways in England and Wales alone, with more in Scotland and Northern Ireland, have suffered algal blooms at levels which may be toxic, as a result of eutrophication caused by phosphates, some 30 per cent. of which is attributable to phosphates in detergents; voices its further concern about the environmental problems of certain commonly-used household detergent compositions, particularly from the use of phosphates and phosphate substitutes, the inadequate biodegradability of other chemicals in detergents and the failure of most manufacturers to provide consumers with full information on the contents and environmental impact of household cleaners; notes that the Government's Environment White Paper did not accept the arguments of The Control of Detergents Pollution Bill, introduced in the last session, to control the use of phosphates, increase the level of biodegradability and introduce comprehensive labelling; further notes that numerous EC countries have imposed restrictions on phosphates in detergents; and urges all hon. Members to encourage the Government to act for consumer and environmental protection.]

May we have a statement on that subject next week as the Government could take action urgently to improve the environment?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern. The Government accept that heightened levels of phosphate can lead to eutrophication, but experience shows that input from detergents is seldom the major cause. Consideration of amendments to the law relating to detergent composition and use should, in our view, await the results of a study commissioned by the Department of the Environment into substitutes for phosphates in detergents, and that is why I cannot promise a statement next week.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that I am very disturbed at the different answers given by the Prime Minister on Tuesday and today about haemophiliacs? On Tuesday, the right hon. Gentleman was asked if he would give urgent consideration to the question of haemophiliacs and he said that he would do so. Today, when the Prime Minister was asked that question, he merely reiterated the old ministerial answer that we are giving money to the Macfarlane fund and the matter is under review. That represents a serious difference and a shift of opinion. May we have a statement next week about where the Prime Minister and the Government stand on the issue? Will there be urgent consideration, or will the answer merely be that we are giving more money and that there will be a standard review?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what the right hon. Gentleman said and I, too, have made comments on the matter at business questions. The Prime Minister made it clear that we are keeping the figure under review, and I cannot add to that now.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend may not be aware that Southampton district council has asked me to request a debate next week about the serious case of the taxi licensing committee which gave a licence to a formerly convicted rapist, a matter which was not revealed during the hearing of the committee. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to make sure that the police authorities provide that sort of information to licensing committees? We really cannot have former rapists driving our taxi cabs.

Mr. MacGregor: I can well understand that it is a matter of concern to my hon. Friend. I cannot say that we can find time in Government time next week to debate the issue, but he will know that there are opportunities available to him, not necessarily next week, to raise the matter in the House.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): While the Leader of the House is basking in being Santa Claus and giving us early holidays, will he bring out of his bag of goodies an

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

announcement to hold a Select Committee on Northern Ireland next week because the so-called rational reasons given for its delay are irrational?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that will be one of the things coming out of the bag next week.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Ben Hopper, the two-year-old British son of a British single parent who is one of my constituents, is to be extradited to Canada against his mother's will under what can best be described as a quirk of the Hague convention? Through Government sources, will my right hon. Friend encourage the Canadian Government to afford Mrs. Hopper legal aid in Canada? Will he please ensure that in future sufficient time is devoted to debates in the House upon conventions and treaties before they are signed by the British Government?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend has already pursued the individual case with the appropriate Minister. I have noted the point that he made about conventions more generally.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greville Janner. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] He was last, last week.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for an early debate on the dangers to elderly people who allow strangers into their homes? They face the risk of personal violence such as that suffered by a Leicestershire pensioner last week who was robbed of all her possessions by a con man. Meanwhile, will the right hon. Gentleman commend the Leicestershire police for their Conwatch scheme, with Age Concern, and ask the Home Secretary to suggest that similar schemes should be brought forward throughout the country?

Mr. MacGregor: Certainly, I commend the Leicestershire police and I am sure that the House will be sorry to hear of the individual case to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred. As he will know, there have been tremendous progress and developments in Homewatch and all such neighbourhood watch schemes throughout the United Kingdom. I shall draw the hon. and learned Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend, but I cannot promise a debate next week.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): The Procedure Committee report referred to by the Prime Minister a few minutes ago contained a number of recommendations that were so unequivocal, persuasive, rational and convincing that a number of us put down an early-day motion a few weeks ago. When are the Government likely to introduce resolutions arising from that report?

Mr. MacGregor: If my hon. Friend has in mind the issue of parliamentary hours and an early-day motion on that subject, rather than one of the other Procedure Committee reports, there have been many suggestions in the past, some of which have been implemented, and whatever is done depends on the co-operation of all hon. Members. We are currently considering how to implement one proposal involving European documents and schemes to reduce the pressure of business in the Chamber. I hope that we can proceed with that idea because it would help. I am happy to look at how we might consider further any other suggestions from hon. Members, and I am also aware of some of the difficulties.

If my hon. Friend was referring to something different, the Joint Committee on Science and Technology—it was not clear from his question—the Government are currently considering the Procedure Committee report on that, and will reply to its recommendations in due course.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on the subject of AIDS, how the Government's publicity programme can be improved, and why family planning clinics are allowed to give free condoms while general practitioners are not although it is young heterosexual males who most need to be made aware of their responsibilities for safe sex?

Mr. MacGregor: Matters relating to AIDS are often discussed in the House and I have no doubt that there will be many opportunities to do so in various ways in future, but I cannot promise a debate next week.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): There is a groundswell of opinion in my constituency that we are not doing enough as a nation for our service men in the Gulf to help them celebrate the festive season. The Ministry of Defence concert has collapsed in some ignominy. Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate the subject?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made his position—that everything possible should be done—very clear in questions earlier this week. I also note that there will be an opportunity to debate this and many other subjects relating to the Gulf in the debate on a motion for the Adjournment next Tuesday.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): What is the timetable for all-party talks or consultations on the poll tax? Will they truly involve every political party in the House and will they start before Christmas?

Mr. MacGregor: That clearly depends on the reaction of those political parties. The House will have noted the muddle and confusion coming from one direction last night. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make some announcements about the timing shortly.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Would my right hon. Friend consider supporting a constitutional reform which might be of service to Members on both sides of the House? I have in mind allotting a certain amount of time for a Leader of the Opposition's Question Time so that right hon. and hon. Members can have an opportunity to follow the various rapid changes in Opposition policy.

Mr. MacGregor: That is an excellent idea, and the House will have noted it, but I have a suspicion that how it might be carried out is not a matter for me.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The Leader of the House will know that the debate on Tuesday on the Gulf is only the second that we have had since the crisis began, and that with the longer Christmas recess we shall not meet again until the day before the United Nations deadline expires. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, although, in a statement shortly to be made, there will be a welcome for

the release of the hostages, the question of the response to the situation in the middle east by the British and American Governments now arises. Will he assure the House that there will be an authoritative statement on this matter, which I hope will tone down the warlike statements made by some people in Washington and London, and will he ensure that there is an opportunity for the House to reach a judgment in a vote on Tuesday, just as the American Congress is demanding a vote before it decides whether to support the US President's policy.

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the importance of this issue. I should have thought that that was clear from the amount of time that we have devoted to it in the House. We have had two statements followed by lengthy exchanges in the past two weeks, and there is another statement today. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will make a clear statement in the debate next Tuesday—so we are giving a good deal of time to the issue.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend will be aware that next week the civil service efficiency unit will be publishing a report on the future of the Public Record Office. Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough to take another look at the business of the House for next week and see whether there would be room to debate that important report, in the hope that the Public Record Office might become a candidate for privatisation or that it might at the very least be given agency status in the near future?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what my hon. Friend said. It would be necessary to look at the report first. I also think that the business of the House next week is fairly full, so I do not think that it will be possible to include this subject then.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): As it is some considerable time since we held a debate on the Government's regional policies, will the Leader of the House consider allowing an early debate to consider the situation in the north and to permit the 26 Labour Members, six Conservative Members and even one Liberal Member representing northern constituencies to make a contribution to it?

Mr. MacGregor: These matters were relevant to the debate that we had on the Queen's Speech. There will be another debate on the economy next week, so there is clearly ample opportunity for hon. Members to put their points of view during that debate.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): As the new Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), has had a welcome conversion on the road to Damascus due to experiences in his constituency, and as he is now opposed to excessive development in the south-east, may we soon have a debate on planning, especially in the light of the fact that Berkshire is having to re-examine its structure plan?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what my hon. Friend has said and I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend, but I do not see an opportunity for a debate on these matters in the near future.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Following the hamfisted way in which the Under-Secretary of State for Wales was dismissed, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Conservative Members are threatening to refuse to serve on the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs? Will he give an undertaking that in no way will such a method be used to bring the Committee's work to an end? Will he undertake to make a statement next week that the Committee will continue irrespective of the antics of his colleagues?

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans on that point.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): With Christmas coming, may I ask my right hon. Friend to look at early-day motion 168 which has been tabled today?

[That this House, gravely concerned about the horrific plight of the many orphans dying behind barbed wire in Romanian institutions, vividly and harrowingly broadcast by Sky Newsline and others, congratulates all those who are providing desperately needed humanitarian aid, both directly and indirectly; calls for all possible further assistance to be rendered both in Romania itself, and to those who are offering to adopt such children into their own families in this country; and welcomes all contributions to the Parliamentary Appeal for Romanian Children.]

Could we possibly find time for a debate on the crisis in Romania, the appalling conditions in the orphanages there, and the problems faced by British couples who are trying to adopt handicapped Romanian orphans?

Mr. MacGregor: I know my hon. Friend's great interest in these matters and I have noted the early-day motion. We fully support the spirit of the motion. That was made clear by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in a debate on the subject on 15 November.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Could the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement about a serious situation in all the Royal Ordnance factories? The British Telecom coverage for those companies from 7 am to 5 o'clock is one of the worst services ever provided for such companies. If there were any breakdown in the system there would be no maintenance at all after 5 o'clock or at the weekend. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will arrange for his right hon. Friend to tell us how that can be improved so that we can have 24-hour coverage in those factories every day of the year.

Mr. MacGregor: I doubt whether that is appropriate for a statement in the House next week, but I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Next Thursday, or in future when we debate and vote upon the restoration of capital punishment, would it be possible at the same time to debate the desirability of a national referendum so that the British people can decide for themselves, once and for all, on this most emotive subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I will forbear from making my own comments on the desirability of referendums. However, I doubt whether a referendum, if one were undertaken, would lead to a once-and-for-all decision. In the debate that will take place on Monday week the House will have an opportunity to vote again on this important issue. It will be up to hon. Members to decide what new clauses to put down. We shall endeavour to ensure that it is a

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thoroughly proper debate. No doubt it will be possible to raise the issue of referendums, but I doubt whether that will be the key issue in the debate.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): May we take it that there will be a statement next week, or perhaps even tomorrow, about the outcome of the GATT negotiations in Brussels? Those negotiations are tremendously important to many of my constituents who work in textiles. We want to know what is happening and perhaps we could even have a debate on this important subject.

Mr. MacGregor: We have recently had a debate on the important subject of the GATT negotiations. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is a crucial issue. He will know about the clear and constructive role that the Government have been playing in the European Community in striving for a successful outcome to the negotiations. We are all aware of the serious implications if we fail to reach such an outcome. I cannot predict exactly when developments might lead to the point at which it would be relevant to make a statement, but I am certain that my right hon. Friends who are conducting the negotiations are aware of that. It might be appropriate to make a statement about the matter at the right time.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 154 which explains that the Government are under pressure to take a decision before the end of the year on United Airlines' application to take over PanAm's slots at Heathrow?

[That this House notes United Airlines' request to operate services from Heathrow in succession to Pan Am; notes that Pan Am will collapse without such an agreement; believes that United Airlines' services from Heathrow will provide much needed competition to British Airways and will improve the standard and quality of service as well as increase choice for the customer; and urges the Government to examine this issue as a matter of urgency and to grant permission by the end of the year, consistent with its policy of liberalisation of, and greater competition in, air travel.]

May I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to my amendment to that, which explains that if that pressure were successful it would harm the airport and my constituents? Will my right hon. Friend find out whether the Government are likely to give in to that pressure? If they are, will he make sure that we have a debate before the end of the year so that those of us who object can explain why we should not yield to that pressure?

Mr. MacGregor: I know of my hon. Friend's concern. I am not sure that it would be right to have a debate before the end of this calendar year because we are in close touch with the United States Government about the implications of the proposal by United Airlines for our bilateral aviation relations. Any decision on whether United Airlines can operate services to Heathrow must await the outcome of the Civil Aviation Authority's review of the 1986 traffic distribution rules for airports serving the London area. The Civil Aviation Authority will be reporting to Ministers early in the new year, and at that point my hon. Friend may like to take up the matter again.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): Will the Leader of the House take into account the fact that the Select Committee on Energy is concerned about the future of the coal industry? Contracts for British coal are short term—three years—and will expire in 1992-93. As the future of the coal industry is important to the House, the economy and the country, may we have a debate to consider that future?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what the hon. Member said. This is an important industry of great concern to the House, but I am not sure when, or in what way, it might be possible to have a debate on the matter.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): May I ask, Mr. Speaker, the question that I asked you on Tuesday? As the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) have arrived here this week with a combined vote less than that cast in my constituency in the last general election, would it not be in order to have a debate on the equal representation of the kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: There have been many debates on that matter. I cannot see much prospect of another in the near future.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for Transport about how announcements about the allocation of money for the building of freight depots are made? In Morley and Leeds, South, Leeds city council spent £2 million buying land in Stourton for a depot that it was informed would be coming to the area. Although none of us has actually been informed, we understand that tomorrow there will be a press conference in the Hilton hotel in Garforth, at which we shall be told that the depot is to be placed elsewhere. I do not argue about that, although I could, but what a way to carry on! We are told that this is a commercial decision, but it is more than that to the north. The announcement should be made in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the right hon. Member will understand that I am not aware of that matter. I will draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. Friend may be aware that the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the National House-Building Council warranty scheme is expected to be presented to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry before Christmas and possibly next week. May we have a statement or a debate on this important matter, and could my right hon. Friend impress upon our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that that report should be published as soon as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that there will not be room for a debate on this matter before Christmas. I do not know whether a statement would be appropriate, but I shall have a discussion with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House acknowledge the importance of the GATT talks which are currently in train in Brussels, especially in relation to textiles and to agricultural support? Even if conclusions have not been reached, will there be a statement on this before Christmas because the technicalities involved and the far-reaching implications of

the talks are such that it would not be right for the House to go into recess without a clear view of the Government's attitude.

Mr. MacGregor: As I made clear a moment ago, I am aware of the serious implications of any breakdown in these negotiations. As Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I took a major part in them in the first two years and was involved in the mid-term review in Montreal. We do not know how they will develop, as the picture is changing during the day. I have shown by the fact that we have already had one full day's debate on the matter that I am aware of its importance, and I will ensure that the House is kept properly informed of any developments.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As we are making something of a new start, could we drop the War Crimes Bill—a piece of gesture politics which, when it first came to the House on a free vote, was not supported by the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary, and about which the vast majority of hon. Members, privately if not publicly, have great reservations? If not, what amendments are the Government thinking of tabling to emasculate it?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear on Tuesday that that proposed legislation is in the Queen's Speech and that we shall be bringing it forward at the proper time, along with any amendments.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): In view of the already declared redundancies in the defence industries, which are but the tip of the iceberg, when can we expect a debate on the redeployment of important skills and retraining to deal with the skills shortage, responsibility for which should not be laid at the doors of the families of the skilled engineers and others who have worked so hard for Britain and are now, apparently, to be thrown on the scrap heap?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously, the response to any change in the market which may come about as a result of fewer defence sales is a matter for the companies themselves. The hon. Gentleman will know that the full range of Government employment training and enterprise services and programmes will be made available in the areas affected. In addition, last Friday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced that extra help and advice will be made available for workers affected by the closures.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if an amended War Crimes Bill were thrown out by the other place the Parliament Act would not be able to come into effect?

Will he also agree with me on a separate point——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked one question, and it is not in order to ask a Minister to agree with an hon. Member.

Mr. MacGregor: We shall have to wait and see what progress we make.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a further statement from the Foreign Secretary after the one that he is to make this afternoon to mark the fact that this weekend will see the third anniversary of the intifada in the occupied territories in which more than 1,000 people have been killed, many of them children, and tens of thousands have been injured? Why have the Palestinians waited 23 years for action to be taken against Israel's occupation of the west bank and Gaza? Do the Government have any new proposals?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is sitting beside me and has heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I believe that he has answered the hon. Gentleman's point on many occasions.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. Friend use his best endeavours to arrange for a statement on Monday from the Foreign Office on the Antarctic treaty negotiations which are taking place in Chile this week?

Mr. MacGregor: I believe that a lengthy statement has recently been made on that.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a matter which is not mentioned a great deal but which is set out in early-day motion 1159.

[That this House is concerned about the plight of the estimated 98,000 incidences of children who run away each year and end up missing on the streets of our major cities; takes note of the Council of Europe recommendation R79(6) adopted in April 1979, which calls on member countries to develop systems to trace missing persons; further notes the recent report from the Association of Chief Police Officers recommending the establishment of a computerised national register to aid in tracing missing persons; and calls upon the Government to ensure that such a system is set up as a matter of urgency so that these children may be protected from danger, their problems may be addressed and reconciliation may be effected where possible.]

That has the signatures of no fewer than 219 hon. Members and it concerns the tracing of missing children. It requests a computer register of the large number of missing children, many of whom come from the north to London. May we have a debate on that important subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. I am trying to keep up with all the early-day motions that have appeared on the Order Paper this Session, but I have not recently read those from the previous Session. I will have a look at early-day motion 1159.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for the Environment to come to the House next week and announce the identities of those Opposition parties prepared to join him in discussions on the poll tax? If the list should include the Scottish National party, that would be no surprise. It saved the skins of the Tory party in 1979 and it is prepared to repeat that heinous crime in 1991. The people of Scotland are surprised that it refused to join the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss the future of the Scottish people, yet it is now prepared to join the Tory Government in order to save them again.

Mr. MacGregor: A statement will not be necessary because the position will become very clear. The situation now is vastly different compared with 1979.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will do my best to call all those right hon. and hon. Members who are on their feet, but I ask them to confine their questions to the subject of next week's business.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May I ask the Leader of the House to make time next week to debate the GATT negotiations? The last such debate was dominated by agriculture, but time should be given to discussing also the textile industries. The GATT negotiations, which will affect 500,000 textile and clothing workers in the United Kingdom, should introduce protection against dumping and a social clause. In Bradford, 14,000 workers depend on the textile industry, and there ought to be both a statement on the GATT negotiations and a debate in Government time because it is the Government and the EEC who are conducting them on behalf of this country.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it clear that I will consider the most appropriate way of reporting developments in the GATT negotiations to the House. Agriculture is critical to those negotiations, so it is understandable that much of the last debate was devoted to that aspect, which is important to the future of our farmers. That recent debate was in Government time.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): In the light of the fact that Allerdale district council poll tax payers face the prospect of picking up a multi-million pound bill for a failed timeshare development which was built on the ill-considered recommendation and advice of that authority's chief executive, should not that matter be referred to the Secretary of State for the Environment and a full inquiry be undertaken to allay public concern?

Mr. MacGregor: I have read the hon. Gentleman's early-day motion on that subject, but, as he knows, local authorities are independent bodies responsible to the courts and to their own electors for their actions. It is not for the Government to intervene in such matters.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I welcome the fact that, thanks to the Opposition, there is to be a debate next week on the recession.. Before then, will the Government make a full statement, which right hon. and hon. Members can take into account when preparing their speeches, on the projected closure of two British Aerospace factories and the loss of 5,000 jobs? Surely the fatuous words of the Secretary of State for Employment about self-employment for those redundant workers cannot be the Government's sole response to the crisis.

Mr. MacGregor: It would not be right to make a statement on that matter in advance, simply in order that right hon. and hon. Members could respond in their own way during the debate. The Government's position on British Aerospace's proposals is already clear. The closures can be raised in next week's debate, but it would not be correct to make a statement in advance.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): When the Leader of the House refers the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) to the Secretary of State for Transport, will he emphasise that if British Rail decides to extend the line to Castleford and Normanton, that will be very welcome in an area which has been devastated by the loss of thousands of jobs in the coal mining industry?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I will convey the hon. Gentleman's remark to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the Leader of the House find time before Christmas for a debate on the worrying decision by the Department of Education and Science to move the National Environmental Research Council from Barry Dock to an inferior location? That will result in the loss not only of many jobs but of a centre of excellence which has directly contributed to Britain's world lead in discoveries relating to the depletion of the ozone layer and to North sea pollution.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that that is a matter for the Natural Environment Research Council. I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend, but I do not think that I can promise a debate in Government time on that matter.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I wonder if the Leader of the House can help me as you, Mr. Speaker, were unable to help me the other day when we had an announcement on the opting out of hospitals. Many hon. Members, with hospitals in our constituencies that had been given permission for trust status, were unable to ask the Secretary of State about those matters. Could the Leader of the House find time in the days available before Christmas for a debate on that subject? Otherwise, the whole question of losing many hospitals from the health service cannot be debated until mid or late January, when it will be too late to do anything about it.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not a question of hospitals being lost to the national health service or opting out of the service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made that clear in answer to the private notice question earlier this week. It is important that misleading statements of that sort should not be made. We were endeavouring to find the best and most convenient way for the House to ask questions of my right hon. Friend on the subject. I cannot promise a debate on the subject, but there are opportunities available to hon. Members to ask questions about particular hospitals.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I warn the Leader of the House that hot air from Henley will not be enough to save the Government from the poll tax revolt? May I assure him that all Opposition Members, and I suspect many Conservative Members, would be prepared to sit up all night every night for as long as it takes to abolish the poll tax and to replace it with a fair rates system, linked to the ability to pay, with generous relief for the poorest in our community? When will he have the guts to come forward with such legislation, on behalf of the Government?

Mr. MacGregor: That is rather ridiculous, because we had a full debate on the subject yesterday. Moreover, I suspect that the idea of staying up night after night for all-night sessions and not going to bed will not appeal to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), who is sitting next to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Will the Leader of the House try to understand that his previous answer about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was wholly unsatisfactory, and will be neither understood nor

forgiven in Scotland? I assure him that there is no problem in finding Opposition Members who are prepared to serve on that Select Committee. Will he therefore concede that it is desertion of parliamentary duty by Conservative Back Bench Members which has led directly to the disgraceful situation in which the Scottish Office, with an annual budget of £11,000 million, is the only major Department of state which is not subject to scrutiny by the Select Committee procedure in this place.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made the position clear on that matter, and I have also made it clear that there are many opportunities to probe Scottish matters in the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Leader of the House has made a statement about Members of Parliament having a three-week holiday, what is he going to do and when will he make a statement about staff in the Refreshment Department in the Houses of Parliament, who are being called upon to work on Christmas Eve and on New Year's Eve, at single-time payments of £3·50 per hour? [HON. MEMBERS: "Why? Who for?"] That is the situation for people who work here, when Members of Parliament, including the right hon. Gentleman's Tory friends, will be sunning themselves in the Caribbean and other places. Is this what he means by a classless society? Why does he not treat them right?

Mr. MacGregor: Those were irrelevant and inaccurate remarks. The point that the hon. Gentleman was raising is a matter for the chairman of the relevant committee—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I think. I think that he has answered questions on this matter in the House, and I shall draw those remarks to his attention.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Leader of the House think again about early-day motion 161?

[That this House notes the encouraging tone of the Prime Minister's reported remarks in the Mail on Sunday on 2nd December, relating to the introduction of more sensible hours and conditions for the House of Commons; and calls upon the Lord President of the Council to bring forward, after due consultation, proposals to effect such a change.]

It has been signed by hon. Members from all parties in the House. The right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have made encouraging and sympathetic noises on the matter. Will he tell the House how we may best process our views, and give him the views of all parties so that we can drag this place into the 20th century while there are 10 years of it left?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that I am happy to consider ways in which proposals might be taken forward. Obviously one of the key ways is through the Procedure Committee. I am happy to consider this matter, and perhaps discuss it more widely in the House, but I repeat that the co-operation of all hon. Members is required if any changes are to come about. The kind of remarks we heard earlier, urging all night sittings on one issue, illustrate some of the difficulties that we face.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): May I support the call of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) for a review of the hours that the House sits? Does he recognise that night sittings are a deterrent to women coming into the House, and that few hon. Members would claim to be at their best after 2 o'clock in the morning? We are heading towards the 21st century with a House of Commons which is stuck in the 17th century. Should we not have businesslike hours, so that we can operate effectively instead of operating like a gentlemen's club?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already expressed my willingness to consider the matter. I suggest that, if the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), who is sitting on the left of the hon. Lady, will not have a word with her about it, she should perhaps have a word with him.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): May I remind the Leader of the House that he promised two weeks ago to send his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary a question of mine about a timetable for the debate on the ratification of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child? To date, I have received no reply. May I repeat my request for the matter to be discussed in the House as soon as possible? If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to redeem himself in the eyes of the children of this country, will he also take note of the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery)?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I will look into it again.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I point out to the Leader of the House that Monday's private business concerns the revival motion for the Kings Cross Railways Bill? The right hon. Gentleman knows that it is generally accepted in the House that the private Bill procedure has been entirely discredited, and is inappropriate for the discussion of important matters such as the location of an international station in London.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that his predecessor gave us a fairly clear indication that the necessary primary legislation would come before the House so that we could change the procedure? There was nothing about that in the Queen's Speech. Can he give us any idea whether we shall be able to discuss such legislation during the current Session? Perhaps if we are running out of business and there is to be a spring election, we shall not be able to do so until the new Parliament. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what work is in progress?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree that some matters relating to the private Bill procedure need to be examined, and I believe that action needs to be taken. I must tell the hon. Gentleman in all frankness that I think it unlikely that primary legislation will be possible in the current Session, but I hope that some recommendations can be dealt with without the need for such legislation; I understand the concern felt by many hon. Members.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): May we have a debate next week on an aspect of the economy to which the Government have paid scant regard—the way in which landlords are exploiting the homeless? One landlord in north Birmingham is renting out eight rooms in a house, charging £126 per week per room, and the Department of Social Security is paying £116 per week. That is exploiting both the taxpayer and homeless people. I cannot understand why the public money involved cannot be converted into capital assets so that homes can be built for people to rent.

Mr. MacGregor: In view of the need for us to get on with today's important debate, and also the next statment, I do not wish to become involved in the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I can tell him that I do not think that we shall have an opportunity to debate them next week.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman here when I said that I would call those hon. Members who were standing?

Mr. Wray: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then of course I will call him.

Mr. Wray: I was beginning to think that you had forgotten my name, Mr. Speaker. You have not called me for some time.

Mr. Speaker: I did not see the hon. Gentleman rise when I said that I would call hon. Members who had been rising. As I have said, of course I will call him if I have made a mistake.

Mr. Wray: Will the Leader of the House summon the Prime Minister to our next sitting and ask him to give us his definition of a classless society? My constituents are finding it very difficult to understand the Prime Minister. During his term at the Treasury, 90,000 people lost their jobs, 22,000 businesses went bankrupt and 27,000 people's houses were repossessed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have been here——

Mr. Skinner: This is a very important question.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I asked hon. Members specifically to relate their questions to next week's business, and not to make constituency points. I do not think that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) can have been present to hear me say that.

Mr. Wray: My question does relate to next week's business, Mr. Speaker—I should like issues that I have raised to be on the agenda. People have had their child benefit frozen for the past three years. If the Prime Minister says that he believes in a classless society, let us hear his definition.

Mr. MacGregor: I believe that there will be an opportunity to debate these matters tomorrow, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be here to make his points. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked about tomorrow in his opening remarks. I am happy to point out to him that since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in government, the work force in employment has risen by more than 3·6 million and, in the period for which figures were last available, 1,700 net new businesses were being opened each week.

Gulf Hostages

4.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the hostages in Iraq and Kuwait.

President Saddam Hussein has today sent a letter to the Iraqi National Assembly requesting that the Assembly "allow all foreigners on whom restrictions were placed to enjoy the freedom of travel and to lift these restrictions". This appears to mean that all foreign hostages in both Iraq and Kuwait will, once the Assembly has given its approval, be free to leave.

The Government welcome this implementation of one of the Security Council's requirements. We have throughout been pressing for the release of all hostages. We are delighted for all the hostages and their families. They have suffered with great dignity and courage over the past weeks and months. We are in close contact with our embassy in Baghdad over the practical arrangements for the departure of all British citizens trapped in Iraq and Kuwait. The ambassador is actively seeking early clarification from the Iraqi authorities. We will then do everything in our power to help those concerned get home as soon as practicable.

Saddam Hussein should now implement in full the United Nations resolutions, which means withdrawing unconditionally from Kuwait and allowing the legitimate Government to return to that country.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I thank the Foreign Secretary for responding to our request for a statement on this matter. We express satisfaction at the decision to release the hostages who, of course, should never have been detained in the first place. We share the rejoicing of the hostages' families that their ordeal will soon be over and that they will be reunited with their loved ones. We greatly welcome the news, not simply for its human implications but for what it may signify.

This is the first positive response by Iraq to any of the United Nations Security Council resolutions—namely, No. 664. Since the inhumane purpose of holding the hostages was to use them as human shields in the event of war, this decision may carry important implications for Iraqi policy. It suggests that the talks between the United States Administration and the Iraqi regime could have a chance of bearing fruit. Taken with the report that the United States may now join the other four permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in advocating an international conference on the middle east, it signals the possibility of a transformation for the good of the agonising situation in the region.

It is clear evidence that sanctions are working, and that they should be given a chance to work further to bring about, if possible, the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait by peaceful means. The United Nations has been and continues to be steadfast on this issue, and a great prize may be available to reward that steadfastness. We remain absolute in our support for the United Nations.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks, and for welcoming the news.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if the news is correct, as we hope it is, it is very welcome? Even in this moment of welcome, will he not

forget the other hostages—I am sure that he would not do so—who have been held in Beirut for much too long, and who should be released as soon as possible? They should have been released long ago. Will he reassure us that despite this, and even with the news of the international conference on long-term security in the middle east, nothing will detract from the determination of the nations of the world to fulfil the United Nations' resolution to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait not only unconditionally and completely but immediately?

Mr. Hurd: I confirm the last point that my right hon. Friend made. I cannot possibly predict how long it will take to carry through what President Saddam Hussein has asked the Iraqi Assembly to consider and to do. I gather that the Assembly is meeting tomorrow. We have many people involved. There are 440 British nationals in hiding in Kuwait. I hope very much that they are covered. We have 355 British nationals at liberty in Iraq and a further 342 detained at strategic sites—about 1,150 all told. The references that have been made to the international conference relate to reports of discussions in the Security Council, particularly between the United States and several non-aligned delegations. The British Government have long felt the need for an international Arab-Israel conference as a way of carrying that forward. It is a little too soon to say whether that possibility has been brought closer. I would advise the House to be a bit cautious.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Foreign Secretary ascertain whether the statement to those who have successfully evaded capture in Kuwait and that they will be free to leave without intimidation? On the wider issue, does he agree that, although there is naturally rejoicing for the hostages and their relatives, there should be no votes of thanks to Saddam Hussein for undoing something that he should not have done in the first place? He must be hoping that, by this manoeuvre, international resolve may weaken. It would be a terrible indictment of the House or of anybody else if we were simply to say, "Our citizens are free, therefore we can forget about Kuwait." Will he reaffirm that we shall remain resolute on the wider issue?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman's first point, about the position of our people who are in hiding in Kuwait, is one of the main points that our ambassador is trying to clear up with the Iraqis. The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right on his second point. Three main requirements were laid down not by us or by the President of the United States but by the Security Council of the United Nations—the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the restoration of the Kuwaiti Government and the freeing of all hostages. If the third of the requirements is carried through, that is welcome news, but it does not detract in the least from the importance of the others.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although we welcome the statement from Baghdad today, we should not forget that the hostages should never have been taken in the first place? The fact that they have been released does not make Saddam Hussein a hero.

Mr. Hurd: No, indeed. His policy has been entirely wrong. I hope that today's announcement means that President Saddam Hussein realises that it has also been a mistake.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that in the Palace of Westminster at the moment are 12 women whose husbands are held hostage in Kuwait or in Iraq? They are determined to make their way to Baghdad to obtain the release of their husbands. In the light of the statement that we have heard today, would it be appropriate for a Minister to meet them to give them counsel and advice in this new situation?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to tell me of this, and I am glad to say that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, in conjunction with him, will gladly meet those ladies. I hope that their journey may no longer prove to be necessary.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): In welcoming the announcement that apparently has been made today, may I echo my right hon. Friend's word of caution? Will he clarify whether a clear indication has been given of the timing of the release of the hostages, whether they are part of the human shield or whether, as was said previously, they are still in hiding?

Mr. Hurd: In his letter to the National Assembly of Iraq, President Saddam Hussein refers to the fact that he had earlier considered a different timing and concentrating on Christmas and the new year. The implication, but not the clear statement, is that he is now talking of immediate release. But that is an implication. It must be cleared up, as must the crucial question whether all the British people, whatever their circumstances and whether they are in Iraq or Kuwait, are covered by the announcement.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that, having spent three hours with Saddam Hussein and his Cabinet last week trying to persuade him to do the very thing that he has now done, including the form of words "freedom of movement" for every resident and an amnesty in Kuwait, I strongly welcome what has happened? However, is it not important now that some of the loose talk from Washington and from Ministers about toppling Saddam Hussein, about demilitarising Iraq by force and about bringing him to trial as a war criminal should be abandoned? There are no United Nations resolutions that encompass that in any way. The path is now open. Saddam Hussein's compliance with the resolution on Kuwait, which I also put to him, would be accelerated if he could be persuaded that he would not be attacked whatever he did.

The question of disputed territory, on which the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has touched, should be dealt with by arbitration, and the compliance by Israel with resolution 242 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the Lebanon are part of a long-term peace process. The lives have been saved——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but I want to remind him that there will be a debate on this subject next Tuesday. *[Interruption.]* Well, there is great pressure on subsequent business. We should confine our questions to the Foreign Secretary today to the immediate issue and not deal with wider issues.

Mr. Benn: I respect your judgment, Mr. Speaker. However, you will recall that I asked that there should be a clear Government statement before Tuesday on the matters that I have tried to raise. Otherwise, we shall not know on Tuesday whether we agree with the Government's line.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman asked in business questions for a further full and authoritative statement; he will get that on Tuesday. I want to refer him to what the Prime Minister has said, to what I have said and to what Secretary Baker has said—that, if President Saddam Hussein does not comply in full with the Security Council resolutions, he will be forced to do so. If he does comply, he will not be attacked.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is not it a fact that Saddam Hussein rounded up two Britons in Kuwait yesterday for use as human shields? Is not it also a fact that his dearest wish is to establish some linkage between his invasion of Kuwait and the settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem? Will my right hon. Friend stand against any such linkage?

Mr. Hurd: I cannot confirm my hon. and learned Friend's first point, but I will look into it and let him know whether our information confirms it.

On the second point, President Saddam Hussein has no particular standing as regards the general problems of the middle east or the Arab-Israel question. We have all been trying for many years—many people tried long before me —to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute. There is no reason why we should stop doing that because of the aggression. However, as I have often explained to the House, I do not see, in practical terms, any prospect of useful initiatives on that subject as long as Saddam Hussein remains the aggressor in possession of Kuwait.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the second most important aspect of the statement—the first, obviously, being the release of hostages—is the fact that Saddam Hussein is starting to comply with the United Nations resolutions? Those hon. Members who are concerned about resolving the issue of the Palestinians and the Israelis should understand that the sooner all states begin to comply with United Nations resolutions the more likelihood there is of resolving the Palestinian question.

The Secretary of State was correct. Today's statement on the possible change in United States policy is intended to ensure that the United States does not use its veto in the Security Council. Will he ensure that our ambassador encourages the United States to accept, for the first time ever, a statement in a resolution that calls for the convening of an international peace conference?

Mr. Hurd: We are very anxious that this aspect of the Security Council's discussions should be carried forward without the dissent and upset that go with a United States veto—or with any veto. I confirm that to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Would my right hon. Friend clarify the meaning of the word "hostage" in his statement? Does it include all the British subjects who were working on contract in Iraq and in Kuwait? I have in mind especially the British service men who were on contract to the Kuwait armed forces. Are they covered by this welcome statement?

Mr. Hurd: The word used by President Saddam Hussein is "foreigners". He does not distinguish between one kind or another. We are trying to clear up as soon as possible the exact scope of the announcement. Obviously, we shall be pressing that it cover all British citizens and all foreigners living in Iraq and Kuwait and wishing to leave.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On behalf of my colleagues I welcome the statement, particularly as President Saddam Hussein kept his word on the release of the Mivan workers when they completed their contract. I hope that his word now given will be speedily fulfilled, and ask him to bear in mind the fact that, in our understanding, a guest is free to move around in the house or in the country. If there are gatecrashers at a party and they do not quietly withdraw when requested to do so, they would be expelled from the country or the house that they were occupying.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this welcome announcement totally vindicates the British Government's stand in refusing to treat with hostage takers and rather endorses the view that we should adopt an uncompromising attitude to those who would seek to infringe human rights and invade sovereign integrity?

Mr. Hurd: I think the whole House would be very pleased if we could move from a situation in which a certain number of hostages—a few dozen here and a few dozen there—are doled out to eminent visitors at the whim of President Saddam Hussein, to the situation for which we have been pressing, in which all hostages are released.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am bound to have regard to the subsequent business before the House. A large number of hon. Members wish to participate, so I shall take three more questions from each side. I bear in mind the fact that we will have a debate on this matter on Tuesday.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Foreign Secretary of the view that the message should go out from the international community loud and clear that the totally unprovoked aggression which occurred on 2 August must come to an end? We must remember, of course, that the people in Kuwait are also hostages to the criminal and terrorist regime of the past few months. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that many Opposition Members opposed the Tory action in 1956, when the Government collaborated with France and Israel against Egypt, and those of us who demonstrated against that totally unjustified aggression take the view that, to be logical, we must totally oppose what happened on 2 August and insist that Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has always been consistent in his belief that on this occasion the Security Council resolution should be fully complied with.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the hostages and their relatives

who have suffered a period of great stress will be delighted at the statement. Without waiting for further details from Baghdad, will he make arrangements for planes to be available to take all the hostages back home to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hurd: We are looking into that matter. Recently, the Iraqis have insisted that people leaving should leave by Iraq Airways. One of the points that we need to establish quickly is whether that will remain their requirement or whether it would be possible for us to mobilise and send aircraft to carry people home.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): May I ask the Foreign Secretary to say as much as he can about this welcome news and the suggestion that the Americans will support a middle east peace conference? Is this part of a peace package? When, as I presume, the Prime Minister meets Mr. Shamir later today, will he say to him that there can be no double standards in the middle east, that just as Saddam Hussein must withdraw from Kuwait, so must Israel withdraw from the occupied territories, and that the way to long-term peace and disarmament in the middle east is the settlement of the Palestinian issue?

Mr. Hurd: I would discourage the hon. Lady from linking those matters. That is why I spoke rather cautiously about the reports of an international conference. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is seeing Mr. Shamir at this time. I am sure that he will set out for the Israeli Prime Minister the efforts that we are making—it is not a matter of dissent between the parties—to bring about a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the news seems to be helpful, but that it hardly gives rise to optimism in the face of the previous behaviour of Saddam Hussein? Can he reassure the House that we will maintain all pressure through diplomatic channels to ascertain the timing of the release and to press for as speedy a release as possible? That is crucial, for political and humanitarian reasons.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with all the points that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): In welcoming the Foreign Secretary's statement, may I ask him whether he will once again press the Iraqi authorities to allow the two remaining diplomats to the British embassy in Kuwait City to resume their proper duties so that they can assist in what we hope will be the repatriation of the 440 British subjects still in hiding in Kuwait?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. Mr. Michael Weston and Mr. Banks have persevered in circumstances of growing difficulty precisely because it was their wish, as well as mine, that they should continue to be able to give some help—not as much as they would like—to the British citizens in Kuwait. I am sure that they will want to continue that.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): While sanctions no doubt play their part, does my right hon. Friend agree that the threat of force was no doubt the critical element in the decision? Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to pay tribute to the men of our armed forces and their families who have been under considerable stress for their part in what is undoubtedly a sacrifice for all concerned?

Mr. Hurd: I gladly join in that tribute. The Security Council resolution last week and the knowledge that it has brought home to Baghdad—that the military option is not a bluff and that, if Saddam Hussein does not leave Kuwait in peace, he will be forced out—is the strongest of the peaceful pressures which can be brought to bear.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 6864/90, relating to a research programme in information technology, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B. —*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): May I raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No, please.

Mr. Hill: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I seldom raise points of order, but, after that statement, I must record the tragic death of one of my constituents who was held as a shield. He died of a heart attack in Iraq. There is still no knowledge of where he died. When we talk about the promises made by Saddam Hussein, we must not forget the terrible tragedy that he has inflicted on many British citizens.

Mr. Speaker: I have allowed the hon. Member to make that comment, in view of the sad occurrence that he mentioned.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. It was not a point of order.

Mr. Hoyle: It is very important.

Mr. Speaker: Everything is important.

Mr. Hoyle: I know that you are irritated.

Mr. Speaker: I am not irritated at all. Equally important are the 30 hon. Members who wish to participate in the next debate. Is the hon. Member's point of order more important than them?

Mr. Hoyle: I do not rise to my feet on a point of order very often—and yes, it is more important. At 12 noon today, one of my constituents heard that her husband was coming home. She heard that from the Iraqi ambassador himself. Although we have had the statement from the Foreign Secretary, can everything possible be done to get those people home to their families before Christmas? That is a very important point of order.

Mr. Speaker: It is of course very important.

European Community (Developments)

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5th December (House of Commons Paper No. 77-i); European Community Documents Nos. 5749/90 and 9258/90 on implementation of the Single Market.]

Mr. Speaker: I must now make a rather sad statement. In view of the number of hon. Members who wish to participate in the next debate, I shall have to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock.

I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of—

(a) developments in the European Community, in particular in view of the forthcoming European Council in Rome on 14th-15th December, with reference also to the White Paper on Developments in the European Community January-June 1990 (Cm. 1234); and

(b) European Community Document No. 9431/90, the European Commission's opinion on the calling of the Inter-Governmental Conference on Political Union which was issued in accordance with Article 236 of the Treaty.

The main purpose of the debate is to look forward to the summit, the meeting of the European Council, at the end of next week and to the start of the two intergovernmental conferences that will begin on Saturday 15 December, one of them on economic and monetary union, in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take the lead, and the other on institutional change in the Community, in which I will take the lead.

I do not intend to speak about economic and monetary union today, because I understand that there will be a debate on it before long. I do not believe that there will be detailed discussion of the subject at the summit at the end of next week. There has been no change in the Government's policy on the matter. I should like a little later to say something about the other intergovernmental conference on institutional change, sometimes called political union.

I will run quickly through what I think will be the main items on the agenda of the European Council. The Prime Minister and I will be carrying to that Council the central message from this Government and country that we want and intend to play a full, central and positive part in all debates on the future of the Community to which we belong. We want to preserve and promote the national interest and to build an open, confident, outward-looking European Community with influence in the world.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow) *rose——*

Mr. Hurd: I will make a little progress with my speech before giving way.

I wish to add a word to our continental partners about recent events in this country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) represented this country at 31 European summits, and not many among those present at Rome next week will be able to remember any other Prime Minister speaking for Britain. My right hon. Friend had her own manner of dealing with Community issues—*[Interruption.]*—which was often controversial, often effective and always distinctive. I know for certain that many who crossed swords with her on those occasions are feeling sad now that she is no longer there.

It would be a mistake for anyone to suppose that, because the leader of the Government has changed, the policy will be reversed. For the last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, my right hon. Friend the present Prime Minister and I have, with other colleagues, worked out and elaborated the policies for Britain in the Community which we believe to be in the national interest as well as in the interests of Europe.

Of course, the style will change—because the choice of words will change; those are personal things—but we shall enter the IGCs, the inter-governmental conferences, intending to make a success of both of them, equipped with our ideas for bringing about that success, and they will still be the main means by which, in the next year or so, the Community will evolve.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, now that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) has gone, that may already be happening—that other Foreign Ministers and Prime Ministers know that they will have to come out and insist on more detail, when previously they could rely on her to do it?

Mr. Hurd: That may well be true. The present Prime Minister will be no less energetic in advancing Britain's ideas, as he was as Chancellor of the Exchequer. His views will not change because he has been promoted, and my views will not change because I have not been promoted.

I would hate there to be any misunderstanding on that point. If our partners go to Rome expecting consistency and continuity in British policy, they will not be disappointed—continuity in the line we take and consistency in our ultimate objectives. The interests of this nation and of the House are paramount, and our policy will be based on a clear appreciation of those interests.

I come to what I know will be the main items before the summit. I shall not say much about the Gulf, except that it is certain that the Community, the summit, will need to have a full discussion on the Gulf. The House will have an opportunity next week to go into the substance of the matter, and hon. Members had an exchange today about the hostages.

It is clear from my discussions at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday that the whole Community, all 12, is united behind the Security Council resolutions, including the last one for which Britain and France voted in New York last week, No. 678, authorising the use of force. I am sure that the European summit will want to make that point clear in Rome at the end of next week.

Another item that will be prominent is the position of the Soviet Union and the extent to which the Community should help that country. We see President Gorbachev and his colleagues striving now—it is not an exaggeration—to save the Soviet Union. In part, they are still using the traditional apparatus of command, and in part they are bringing forward reforms, both political and economic.

I do not think we should pretend that our sympathy and help will be decisive. We cannot solve the problems of the republics and their relationship with Moscow. We cannot ourselves rescue from disintegration the command economy to which the Soviet Union was accustomed. We

cannot ourselves replace that command economy with a lively free market. Those are all things that they must work out for themselves.

If we can give useful help—I underline the word "useful"—it is in our interest to do so, because it is not in our interest that the Soviet Union should dissolve into rival warring republics or lapse back into some form of dangerous tyranny. But untargeted help would not have a great impact. Indeed, it might even help to prop up the crumbling structures.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

What we must try to do—in what Britain and the Community does—is help the Russians to mobilise their own huge resources. That means that the Community should agree practical measures of technical assistance to help provide western know-how in key sectors of the economy. One obvious example is energy, about which the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr. Lubbers, put forward an interesting plan which I hope the summit will help to carry forward.

We want to help create an active private sector in the Soviet Union, and in the long run that country will need private sector investment from the west. But that requires a degree of certainty and confidence—a framework within which investors can work—and that is why we are pressing the Commission to bring forward ideas in that sphere.

The most pressing need is on the food side. The best available evidence we have suggests that, after a record grain harvest, there exists sufficient food for all. It exists and it is there, but problems of hoarding and distribution prevent it from getting to the places where there are shortages. The full picture is far from clear. Anecdotal evidence contradicts itself to some extent, and I hope that the summit will receive—we have asked for it—a clear and expert assessment of identifiable needs and of ways in which the Community could respond usefully.

Mr. Grant: It is rumoured that the Soviet Union has tremendous gold reserves and billions of dollars in western banks. Is it reasonable for the European Community to give food and monetary aid to the Soviet Union when it already has substantial sums of money and, as the right hon. Gentleman told us, food, when there are starving people in third world countries who could use that money and aid?

Mr. Hurd: I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that, when people are starving, it is right that humanitarian aid should be given. That applies in the horn of Africa and in the Soviet Union—provided that the food will reach the people in need, and that is a big proviso.

As for the bigger questions of financial help—balance of payments help and so on—I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, and I was coming to that point. I do not think it is sensible to rush into giving that kind of help, at least not without a proper assessment, not just by the European Commission but by the International Monetary Fund—something with which African countries are familiar. One must respect the position of the Soviet Union, its history and its sensitivities, but I believe that there is a clear distinction between what we can do in terms of food and technical assistance—the case for technical assistance is overwhelming—and the longer-term, larger-scale balance of payments help, which must be carefully considered.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Given the success of the Red Cross in distributing German supplies in the Soviet Union, might there be a case for having an arrangement to encourage British transportation to distribute Russian food?

Mr. Hurd: There might be. The question of the distribution of food is crucial, and when I announced the British know-how fund for the Soviet Union a few weeks ago, I listed food distribution as an area in which Britain could be of particular help, and projects of that type can be among the first calls on the know-how fund.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity, following the welcome resignation of General Ershad as President of Bangladesh, to make clear to the Bangladesh military that, if it was unwise enough to stage a coup d'etat at this time in an effort to stop free and fair elections being held in Bangladesh——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Madden: —to elect a president and parliament that the British Government and the international community——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not persist in ignoring the Chair. I fail to see what relevance his intervention has to the matter before us.

Mr. Hurd: I cannot reward the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) for that. I would rather prepare and choose my words carefully on the subject of Bangledesh before discussing it.

I shall move on to a related issue that will certainly be on the summit's agenda, eastern Europe as a whole——

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I shall proceed for a little longer, and then I shall give way to my hon. Friend if he wishes to intervene.

The countries of eastern Europe rely to a substantial extent on the Community and the western world for help in bringing forward their reforms. Britain, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, took the lead in encouraging reform in eastern Europe and stimulating international support for it. We recognise that the new democracies need trade as much as aid. That is why we have proposed, and the Community has endorsed, association agreements between the Community and Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. They will provide a framework for the sort of wide-ranging co-operation we want, with the eventual goals of free trade arrangements and a clear link with the Community.

The newly democratic countries face a serious economic problem as a result of the Gulf crisis and the rise in oil price. That subject is being, and will need to be, discussed. Without going into it in detail, I would simply say that we are clear that those new, pressing needs of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other such countries cannot be tackled simply by using the Community's resources. It will be necessary to bring in the resources of the entire Group of 24, including the United

[Mr. Hurd]

States, Canada and Japan. I think we should also bring in the resources of some of the Gulf countries which benefited substantially from the same process.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: It is important for my right hon. Friend to clarify one aspect of what he said about Government policy. Sustaining President Gorbachev in keeping the USSR cohesive is one thing, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that that does not prejudice the position of the three Baltic republics, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the overrunning of which by Soviet Russia the United Kingdom has never recognised as an extension of Soviet territory to include those republics? We must not betray them merely because there are other difficulties within the Soviet Union.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is entirely right——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I suppose all that is in order.

Mr. Hurd: Of course it is in order, because I have been talking about the Soviet Union. It is not for me to say, but I should have thought that it was naturally in order.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hislop) is right—we have constantly made it clear to the Soviet Government that we regard the three Baltic republics as being in a different position, legally and historically, from the other republics of the Soviet Union.

The subject of the negotiations between the Community and the European Free Trade Association, and the enlargement of the Community may come up at the summit and is, anyway, of interest to the House. We believe that the Community should be open to new membership for those who satisfy the obligations of membership and to increased and more liberal trade with third world countries. At present, the EFTA countries are negotiating with us to extend the Community's internal market to encompass them, and we strongly support those negotiations because it is important that they should succeed. That may or may not lead eventually to full membership of the Community by the EFTA countries.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose——*

Mr. Hurd: I should like to get on.

We have received an application from one of the EFTA countries, Austria. As the decade goes on, there may well be other applications for full membership from some of the newly democratic countries of central and eastern Europe that I mentioned. If so, the association agreements to which I referred, which we strongly support, will be seen as a bridge to full membership. Negotiations on when and how full membership of those countries can be achieved will be necessary. We must not say to countries that apply, "You may be European and democratic and have a free market, but we think that 12 is a good number, so goodbye."

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The right hon. Gentleman appears to be reviewing priorities for next week's talks. In that regard, what can he tell the House today about the Community's posture on the Uruguay round negotiations? Is he aware of the deep concern about that issue in New Zealand, Australia and many of the poorest developing Commonwealth countries?

Mr. Hurd: Indeed: that was to be my next topic, which shows the wisdom of trying to make progress in a speech before giving way. It may be useful to discuss that subject at the European summit, although that depends slightly on what happens in the negotiations in Brussels in the next few days. Today, the Ministers are continuing the meeting in Brussels, but the position changes almost every hour.

Overnight, the Uruguayan chairman proposed that the five key subjects in the negotiations—agriculture, services, textiles, intellectual property and the general agreement on tariffs and trade rules—should be taken together. When I last touched base with Brussels, it was not clear whether that proposal would go forward or talks had broken down or been suspended. The crisis was triggered by the American rejection of the Uruguayan chairman's approach, because the Americans were insisting on separate Community concessions on agriculture first. Today, the Community has indicated that it is willing to be flexible on that issue, but the Americans also need to make concessions, particularly on services.

The aim of GATT is that everyone should gain, which will require everyone making concessions in order to achieve the desired overall gain. There is a sense of crisis —which may have been necessary to jolt people out of their entrenched positions. I agree with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) that there now has to be genuine negotiation.

Another item on the summit's agenda will be the Commission's report on progress towards a single market. I hope that the House will not lose sight of what has been, and continues to be for this country, one of the main objectives of the Community over recent years—we are in sight of a single market of 340 million people, a unique achievement in history. It will be dynamic because, as the Scrutiny Committee well knows, beneath the simplicity of abolishing the trade barriers lies a complex programme of legislation.

The Common Market programme is about two thirds complete, and the summit will review progress on the basis of a report from President Delors. Britain will have to set the priorities for the next phase and ensure that enforcement of measures already agreed is adequate. The key sectors where we want to see quick progress include public procurement, financial services and liberalisation of transport.

The intergovernmental conference on institutional reform is called political union, although that is a somewhat misleading phrase. During recent weeks, our concern has been to ensure that there will be no attempt at the second summit in Rome at the end of next week to pre-empt that conference by laying down what it should or should not decide before it has even met. We have been anxious to avoid a repetition of what occurred at the first Rome summit in October in relation to economic and monetary union. I was reasonably encouraged by the discussions that we had in the Foreign Affairs Council —*[Interruption.]* May I hold the attention of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) for a few minutes longer?

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, when he said that he did

not want a repeat of the events of October, I was merely reflecting the fact that I agree with him? Having lost the then Prime Minister, we certainly do not want to lose the present one.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman was not reflecting—he was chatting, which put me off my stride. I am grateful that he has got his not particularly pertinent point off his chest.

I was reasonably encouraged by the discussion on the subject at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday. It seemed that a genuine effort was being made for the summit to consider the matter on the basis of the different opinions so far expressed, rather than try to create, on Friday and Saturday morning, a mandate for a conference that starts on Saturday afternoon. I hope that there will be no last-minute surprises on that front. We will go into the intergovernmental conference with our ideas and proposals. Others will put forward their ideas, which we do not find convincing.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the basic problems is that there is no clear definition of the principle of subsidiarity or of how it can be implemented practically as an ever wider range of measures comes from the Commission? So will one of the ideas that my right hon. Friend takes forward be a clear definition and method of enforcement of this principle?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I shall come to his point shortly.

We will put forward our ideas and others will put forward ideas that we do not find convincing—that is the nature of discussion in the Community and in this House. We are not persuaded by the case that some people make for an extension of the competence of the Commission, or of the case for the wholesale extension of qualified majority voting, or of the case for adding again to the legislative powers of the European Parliament. To make any of these changes, a convincing case would be necessary, but it has not been made.

We do not see the Community to which we belong as a river or glacier that moves inexorably in a preordained direction. That is not how it works or how it should work. The Community evolves, but that evolution takes place by working out what its needs are, not by some inevitable law of gravity or some movement in the stars. That means that we should not say "never" to any change in these matters. What we can say and what we have been saying under the last Prime Minister and under the present one is that we are not persuaded of the case for such changes.

Because we are not persuaded of the case for a change in the three respects that I have mentioned, that does not mean that our stance in this conference will be negative.

Mr. Gill: I invite my right hon. Friend to comment on subsidiarity, which no doubt will form part of the conference agenda. Will he bear in mind when discussing it how imperfectly the principle of subsidiarity is applied even in our country? Many Members of this House would like to think that the powers ceded to the higher authority will be agreed by the lower tier rather than the other way round. We do not want crumbs from the Commission's table.

Mr. Hurd: Of course, my hon. Friend's second point is right. A large part of discussion within the Community is about whether it is sensible for nation states which have their powers to yield competence in certain spheres. It should not be a question of the Community sitting on high and doling out powers to nation states; it is the other way around.

I move now from the areas of which we must say that we are not persuaded of the need for change to the areas about which we have specific and positive ideas. We want to make the Community more efficient and effective. Part of that means making sure that it operates only where it needs to. We want to improve enforcement and compliance—carrying out in practice what is talked about and agreed in principle. We want to strengthen the voice of Europe on the world stage, and we want to reinforce the democratic accountability of the Community.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My right hon. Friend will be interested to know that I have with me the draft statutes for the European central bank, supplied to me this afternoon by the Bank of England. They state:

"The statute—as the Treaty itself—will have the status of primary Community law and therefore any amendment to the statute would normally be subjected to the procedure applied to EEC Treaty changes."

Given the importance of democracy here and in Europe, would I be right in thinking that we will not accept that point?

Mr. Hurd: That is a matter for the Chancellor and for the debate that we shall have on economic and monetary union. As we do not accept the principle of the proposal illustrated in those statutes, I think that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will feel fairly robustly about what my hon. Friend has just said.

We want, as I have said, to make the Community more effective, operating only where it needs to but operating fairly and well where it does. We want to improve compliance with the rulings of the European Court. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) nodded when I made that point earlier. She will probably know that, at the end of last year, there were 80 outstanding judgments by the European Court against European member states, and that only one was against this country. We have an excellent record of compliance. We should like the conference to consider sanctions in cases of prolonged failure to comply. We want the Council to look at implementation of decisions by the Council through the passage of national legislation.

The Government are sometimes criticised for their record in social matters in the Community, but we are the only country to have implemented all Community directives on social matters. We are the only country to have carried through completely what we said we would do. That is a distinction that we must draw continually in the Community.

I am afraid that the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen are increasingly seduced by declarations such as the social charter, and so are not watching what is happening and the extent to which other countries carry through what they say they are in favour of.

Two of my hon. Friends have asked me to comment on subsidiarity. We want the conference to determine whether this principle can be brought into the treaties in a useful way. That could be done if we can properly define subsidiarity. It would help the Community to decide before setting out what it should do whether it is necessary for it to do anything, or whether the subject concerned is best left to member states.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we recently held the conference of the Parliaments of the European Community? I quote from the preamble to its final declaration:

"While seeking to remodel the Community into a European Union on a federal basis".

The conference's idea of subsidiarity was that it comes from the top down; it was content to delegate powers downwards to sovereign states. We want sovereign states which might, perhaps, be prepared to delegate powers to European institutions—unlike the declaration that I have cited. With the best will in the world, we are not talking the same language as our European partners.

Mr. Hurd: In the IGC, we will discuss treaty changes that can be achieved only by unanimity. It will not be like a parliamentary debate, ending in a majority vote. I am setting out the sort of improvements in Community institutions that we think are sensible. We shall argue our case, others will argue theirs, and we shall see at the end how we get on. There is no question of the British Government agreeing to proposals that reflect the declaration that my hon. Friend has just quoted.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Leighton: Will the principle of subsidiarity be spelt out clearly in the treaties, and will it be justiciable before the court?

Mr. Hurd: Those are the two very issues that the conference will have to tackle. We shall have to look for a way of spelling out subsidiarity in the treaty; then we need to find a way of enforcing it. It will not necessarily have to be enforced by the European Court of Justice: there are other ways of enforcing it. I am glad now that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because he put his finger on two practical questions to which we shall have to find positive answers. If we cannot find them, we shall have had a useful debate but we will not have found a practical way of including the principle in the treaties.

We should like national Parliaments to work singly and together to improve their influence over the Council of Ministers. We would like the European Parliament to direct fresh energy not at increasing its legislative powers, but at strengthening financial accountability by reinforcing the role of the Budgetary Control Committee and the Court of Auditors. We hope that national Parliaments will be more effective in controlling the Council of Ministers, whereas the European Parliament would be more effective at doing what the House cannot do, which is monitoring and strengthening the financial accountability of the Commission.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: No. I know the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter, and I have tried to meet what I know is his point.

Our third objective in the intergovernmental conference will be to strengthen the voice of the Community in the world. As the House knows, the Community already co-ordinates foreign policy by consensus. We think that that should continue and we have made modest but specific proposals for improving that co-ordination. We think that the conference should define more clearly security questions, which are also dealt with by consensus. The Twelve have edged forward to discussing certain security questions, despite the reserve of the Irish, and those discussions can be defined and strengthened.

I shall give two examples of security questions which we think that the Twelve can reasonably consider. They can consider all that is carried forward from the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, the confidence building schemes, the conciliation of disputes and the conflict prevention centre. Those matters can rightly be co-ordinated in the Twelve, although they also need to be discussed with the United States and Canada. Another example is the export of arms and weapons technology, in which the Opposition are traditionally interested. Such subjects come under the heading of security questions which we think the Twelve can usefully consider.

Defence is a distinct matter. The collective guarantees under which we live in safety, the integrated command and the deployment of forces and weapons are regarded as a separate matter under the heading of defence. I see a clear need to build up the European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance, and I think that that will be one of the main debates and needs of 1991. However, I do not think that the Twelve are the right instrument for that, although the Italians have ideas in this field. The Twelve will not be intimately concerned with defence as I have defined it.

The Western European Union is a more fitting instrument for building up the European pillar of the alliance. In the coming months, we hope to develop our ideas on that, not just at the intergovernmental conference but in the WEU and at the NATO review, which is a rejuvenating, a changing, of NATO to meet new circumstances.

I have tried to cover the main ideas which I foresee on the summit agenda. I have tried to give the House some fresh information about the line that we shall take in the intergovernmental conference on political union and the institution of the Community.

Mr. Skinner: Cotton wool.

Mr. Hurd: The Community and the House evolve by discussion and argument, and even the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is anxious to take part in such debate. His participation in this debate has been almost continuous.

Mr. Skinner: I have listened to the Secretary of State for the last half hour. His background is that of a diplomat. He is supposed to be telling us about what will happen and about the Government's position at this international government conference. He has wrapped the whole thing in cotton wool and he does not have the guts to tell the House why. It is because some of his hon. Friends are against the Common Market and some, such as the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), are Euro-fanatics. By trying to placate both factions, the right hon. Gentleman tells us exactly nothing. That is his game; but he does not con me.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has been talking all the time, and I can therefore accuse him of not listening. Plainly, he has not listened to a word of my clear and distinctive speech about Government policy. I am delighted that I have been able to expose the hon. Gentleman in this way.

The policies which I have outlined and those which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will outline in the debate on economic and monetary union command overwhelming support in the House. Those positive ideas will preserve and advance the national interest by making a success of our membership of the Community.

5.24 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"condemns Her Majesty's Government for its neglect of British interests in the European Community and its failure to produce a coherent policy towards the Inter-Governmental Conferences due to be held next week.".

Anyone listening to the Secretary of State's placid not to say soporific account of events in the Community would never think that that issue has caused such upheavals in the Government. It has cost them the resignation of six Cabinet Ministers in the past five years, including the deputy Prime Minister last month and the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago. I am not sure to what extent the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) would welcome the somewhat morbid obituary notice that the right hon. Gentleman has delivered on her. Regardless of the quaint remarks with which the right hon. Gentleman finished his speech, if the Government go on in the same way as before, more resignations may well be expected before they are done.

We really must hand it to the Foreign Secretary. Four weeks ago he spoke about the European Community in the debate on the Queen's Speech and said:

"One thing that has emerged clearly from our exchanges yesterday was that there was a great deal more light and sweetness on this side of the House than there was on the other side. Our view has been expressed with admirable clarity and coherence."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 152.]

Within five days of the Foreign Secretary saying that, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) tore the veil aside and showed that the Cabinet was a snakepit of dissension and backbiting on the issue of Europe. No one would have thought from the Foreign Secretary's speech today that in this area of policy the Government have been isolated time and again on the wrong side of the debate within the Community. The new Prime Minister has once again declared his opposition to the social charter.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport) *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) should not intervene. If he had sensibly kept his mouth shut, he would now be with the Prime Minister and Mr. Shamir instead of on the tundra of the Back Benches.

Mr. Favell: Does the right hon. Gentleman have the support of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in his approach to Europe?

Mr. Kaufman: I always have the idiosyncratic support of my hon. Friend on every matter to which I refer. I know the size of the majority of the hon. Member for Stockport. After the general election he will not be able to give support to anybody from Stockport.

The Government have been on the wrong side of every European Community debate. They have been on the wrong side of the debate on the social charter, on employment practices, and on carbon dioxide emissions, on which the United Kingdom had to be given a special dispensation for a five-year delay. That was an issue on which the Government blew loud trumpets that turned out to be raspberries.

The style has now changed dramatically and the change was signalled by the new Prime Minister in one of a never-ending series of interviews that he gave during the Tory leadership campaign. The text and transcripts of those interviews provide a rich goldmine of quotational nuggets that will be used to our satisfaction and benefit for some time. In an interview with Brian Walden the new Prime Minister spoke approvingly of compromise within the Community, or what he called fudging things. Fudge is certainly on the menu today.

Under the previous Prime Minister, we and Europe knew exactly where we were. Ministers, led by her, went into meetings and conferences simply saying no to whatever was proposed. Now, there has been a dramatic reversal. From a policy of no, the Government have moved to a policy of no policy. We got the first remarkable example yesterday, when the Secretary of State for the Environment, having fought his leadership campaign on a manifesto of changing the poll tax, came to the House with the dramatic news that he had no policy on the matter, and was installing a suggestions box next to the letter board in the Members' Lobby. That is a mess that the new Government have created for themselves, and in which they now wallow uncomfortably.

The policy of no policy on the European Community is, however, a far graver matter, for it means that next week the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer go to Italy for three meetings crucial to the political, economic, industrial and social future of the country with next to nothing to say. Perhaps the new Prime Minister's approach was symbolised by what happened to his speech at the Altrincham and Sale Conservative party dinner last Thursday. The text of the speech got lost. Perhaps it was cleared away by sensible waitresses, along with the dirty crockery and the soiled serviettes. This is what he said:

"It means that we must put forward our own ideas for a liberal and open Community . . . That will be easier to achieve if our partners in the Community are convinced that we are whole-heartedly engaged with them in the great enterprise of building, shaping and developing Europe.

I want Britain to play a leadership role in that enterprise".

It is not clear what those words mean.

During the leadership election campaign, the Foreign Secretary proposed, as part of his platform, drafting a Cabinet paper on Europe, as if it were some revolutionary proposal, which I suppose that it was for this Government. He said:

"concern about Europe runs very high and I would like to see the publication, quite openly, of more of the information that would go to the Cabinet so the House and the public can be well informed of the choices facing the Government."

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way later, but I wish to deal with what the Foreign Secretary proposed, and what has come of his proposal, because that is important. What has become of the paper? Was it discussed at today's Cabinet meeting? It seems not because, according to *The Guardian* today, the Foreign Secretary, at the meeting of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs yesterday,

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"hinted that the government had shelved its plan to issue a broad-brush policy paper on Europe before the Rome summit. Instead, it was concentrating on refining its proposals for the intergovernmental conference on political union, which would be launched then."

Today, *The Times* puts the situation more bleakly. It says:

"The government has delayed or shelved plans to produce a white paper . . . on Europe amid hints that a cabinet consensus may be harder to reach than expected. A senior"—

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall in a moment, but I am quoting from *The Times* and one must not interrupt that. *The Times* says:

"A senior source"—

to our delight, no longer Mr. Bernard Ingham—

"said that the cabinet did not want such a paper at this time, and was uncertain that it would ever be produced."

Where are we on this? If the Cabinet is not even discussing the matter, if it has not got a paper, if it has no idea of what is to go before the intergovernmental conference next week, how can anybody else comment on the Government's policies? How can our partners in Europe respond? How can the House of Commons comment and how can the British people, who may be said to have some justified interest in the matter, comment?

Mr. Oppenheim: The right hon. Gentleman accused the Government of having no policy on Europe. Perhaps he can enlighten the House by telling us whether the Opposition have a policy on a single currency. Are the Opposition in favour of a single currency, yes or no?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall come to those very matters.

Mr. Oppenheim: Yes or no?

Mr. Kaufman: I do not know which way the hon. Gentleman voted last week, but I had better advise him to stop asking for yes or no answers because I have some quotations from the new Prime Minister on the matter that do not add up to yes or no. I shall come to that.

The Labour party conference, two months ago, passed a detailed policy on political union and political progress. On economic and monetary union, our national executive will publish a detailed policy next week, which I shall gladly send to the hon. Gentleman. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), to whom reference has been made, is aware of that because he was the only person to vote against the policy.

Mr. Skinner: I should have been in a minority of two but the chair would not accept the Baghdad proxy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was in the Gulf.

Mr. Kaufman: My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was not in the Gulf; he was in Mesopotamia. The Gulf is a bit further south-east. My right hon. Friend was carrying out his mission and was not able to vote.

Mr. Skinner: He did a good job.

Mr. Kaufman: He did a job. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover must be relieved and satisfied that he upheld that minority view in the national executive, but he has confirmed that the Labour party has a detailed policy of economic and monetary union, on which only a tiny minority of the party has stated its reservations. That is completely different from the deep split in the Tory party.

The Foreign Secretary said this afternoon that the Government will go into the intergovernmental conference with their own ideas and proposals. Given what he said, you could have fooled me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Six months after signing up at Dublin to full union before the end of 1992—that is what the right hon. Member for Finchley, with the Foreign Secretary, did, and she did not deny that when asked about it in the Chamber—the Government have no idea about what they mean to do, apart from the farce of the hard ecu.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but when I have done that, I shall not give way again because many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

Mr. Nicholls: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Altrincham. That speech says:

"It doesn't mean that we have to accept a federal Europe: certainly not. There is no question of that."

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is fresh back from Rome where he voted in favour of a declaration containing an undertaking to seek to remodel the Community into a European union on a federal basis. We know that that is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government because we have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said. Will the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) now tell us whether that is Labour policy?

Mr. Kaufman: I understand that the hon. Gentleman left early, so I am not sure about the basis of his comments. We also know that the Conservative delegation, if one can call it that, was split not just down the middle but into several fragments at the assizes.

We have the very great advantage, indeed the enticing prospect, that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) hopes to catch Mr. Speaker's eye to wind up the debate for the Opposition. Having been there all the time, he will speak with great authority on the matter.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. If the hon. Gentleman wants to ask about the document, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton will deal with it with his customary suavity and competence.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: No, I have explained what will happen with regard to that document.

There are some issues on which the Government's confusion has become even worse. For example, we thought that we knew roughly where the Government stood on defence—that is, that they were against a defence role for the Community. But now, suddenly, all that seems to be in the melting pot.

In Brussels, the Foreign Secretary was quoted as saying that there were now compelling arguments for much closer EC co-operation over defence and security. The correspondent from *The Guardian* in Brussels made a further report on the matter, in which he said:

"In a first sign of a softening in the Government's line on Europe since John Major became Prime Minister, the Foreign

Secretary, Douglas Hurd, signalled yesterday that Britain may support giving the European Community a formal role in foreign policy and security."

We had another variation of what the Foreign Secretary is proposing when he was questioned by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs yesterday. We had yet another variation today. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House with great clarity whether the Government support and advocate, or do not support and advocate, a defence role for the Community? If the right hon. Gentleman does not support and advocate a defence role, but does support and advocate a security role, will he explain the difference between the two, and will he then also explain how that fits in with our commitments to NATO?

Mr. Hurd: I said exactly the same in my press conference in Brussels and to the Select Committee. I do not believe that the 12 should have a defence role, and I draw a distinction between the defence role and security matters; a distinction that I explained in some detail 10 minutes ago.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman may have sought to explain it, but he did not explain it in a way that was clear to the House. He talked about co-operation on the Gulf and he reproved members of the Community for what he claimed to be their inadequate response to the Gulf crisis. Does the right hon. Gentleman see the Community co-ordinating a military response in the Gulf? Does he see it co-ordinating a naval blockade in the Gulf? Does he see it co-ordinating an air blockade in the Gulf? If so, what was he up to talking about the Community's response on Gulf issues? Hostages are clearly an important matter, but is that a security matter? We need to know what the Government mean by security as distinct from defence.

Those are important matters, on which the Government may come to the House with legislation at a future date and we need to know exactly what they propose. After all the right hon. Gentleman's statements in Brussels, his statement to the Select Committee and his further statement this afternoon, what he is proposing is not at all clear and could be dangerous.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke this afternoon, as he has on other occasions, about majority voting. But nobody has any clear idea where he, and therefore the Government, stands on majority voting. Speaking to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on 25 July 1990 he said:

"Undoubtedly, this country has quite substantially gained from the Single European Act, in that many of the decisions leading to the Single Market are to be taken by qualified majority. We and the Commission would not be nearly so successful in demolishing protectionism in the Community had it not been for qualified majority voting, and that is a point I ought to make from the point of view of those who approach qualified majority voting with some suspicion."

That appears to me to be something of an encomium for qualified majority voting.

Three months later the right hon. Gentleman appeared to change his mind. In the debate on the Queen's Speech on 8 November, four weeks ago today, he said:

"We do not want . . . significantly extending qualified majority voting."

Does that mean more majority voting or not? What is the significance of the word "significantly"? Does he mean that he is opposed to any more qualified majority voting, or that he is ready to see some more qualified majority voting? If so, in what areas?

That is an important issue for the political intergovernmental conference, yet there has not been a word of clarification today, just a repetition of the fuzzy words on the matter that the right hon. Gentleman has been saying all along, except, as I say, for his encomium for qualified majority voting at the House of Lords Select Committee three months ago. If he cannot sort out his own mind, how on earth will he make a clear, positive and useful contribution at the intergovernmental conference?

What about the issue of sovereignty? In his interview with Mr. Walden on 25 November, the new Prime Minister—not then the Prime Minister but about to become so—seemed very firm. He said:

"At the moment I can foresee no chance of pooling any more sovereignty."

He also said:

"I see no circumstances at the moment in which we could or would present legislation to the House of Commons to surrender more sovereignty."

That seemed pretty clear until one read it, when one saw that repeated phrase, "at the moment". That gave the Prime Minister a let-out should he decide to change his mind. The chances of his changing his mind seem quite strong.

In yet another campaign interview published two days later on 27 November in the *Financial Times* the Prime Minister said:

"I have no doubt that when we go through this conference"—

that is, the intergovernmental conference—

"it is possible to negotiate a treaty that will be acceptable to the House of Commons that will move Europe forward and keep it forward together."

What will there be a new treaty for if we are not going to sacrifice, as the right hon. Member for Finchley would put it, some sovereignty?

The Prime Minister acknowledged in that interview that a new treaty would have to come to the House, and a new treaty will mean, in the Prime Minister's own words, pooling more sovereignty; surrendering more sovereignty. Where do the Government stand on the issue of sovereignty? Where do they stand on a new treaty? Do they accept that they may have to bring this new legislation, pooling or surrendering sovereignty, to the House, and that if they meet opposition, they may have to guillotine it through the House as they did the Single European Act?

We have a right to know about those matters, but the Foreign Secretary told us nothing about them this afternoon. It may be that there is a good reason for that. Perhaps he does not know himself. Perhaps, in the immortal words of the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Government are ruling nothing in and ruling nothing out. We do not know. The Foreign Secretary did not tell us. The only hint that he has given about proposals for the political intergovernmental conference, before his extremely woolly words this afternoon, was provided in his speech to the House on 8 November when he said:

"we would like to see a more prominent role for the European Parliament, not by giving it more legislative powers but in monitoring Community expenditure."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 152-53.]

What on earth does that mean? What does it mean in terms of providing powers or not providing powers for the

[Mr. Kaufman]

European Parliament? It cannot be given a greater role without being given more powers and that may need legislation in this House and in the other areas of the Community.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I have already told the hon. Gentleman that, because of the pressure on time, I shall not give way again.

Whatever the Foreign Secretary means by monitoring by the European Parliament of Community expenditure, will he propose such an innovation at the intergovernmental conference next week?

What about the widening of the Community? Austria's application for membership has been lodged, and Labour thinks that it should be accepted right away. There is no good reason for delaying Austrian accession to the Community until 1992 or any other year. The Foreign Secretary made a brief reference this afternoon to widening the Community, but he did not say whether the Government are in favour of immediate Austrian membership. He spoke again about negotiations on the European Free Trade Area. Will the right hon. Gentleman propose in Rome not only that Austria be admitted immediately, but that applications be invited from Sweden, whose Government have shown great and positive interest, and from the remaining EFTA countries? We should welcome all the EFTA countries into the Community as soon as they positively want to join.

The Government have failed to state their policy clearly and without equivocation—and having heard the Foreign Secretary's speech, I am not even sure that the Government have a policy. Like the former Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary has spoken at length about the accession of eastern European countries—and when the necessary conditions are fulfilled, we should welcome their membership as well. However, the Government do not appear to have a clear policy on the accession of other western European countries.

The Government's confusion in relation to political progress is as nothing compared with their total disarray over economic and monetary union. The Government promised a debate at some stage, but it is disgraceful that the House will not have that opportunity before the Chancellor of the Exchequer goes to the intergovernmental conference next week. The Foreign Secretary says, "I shall not refer to that aspect, because the House is to debate it." However, that will be after the intergovernmental conference, at which the Government may have made unequivocal commitments or even threats—and that could be very dangerous.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that, although there may be a debate on economic and monetary union, it will not be arranged for next week—and that because there will be one of two conferences next weekend, today is the last opportunity to debate economic and monetary union before that conference? Does not it follow, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that any speeches about, or references to, that aspect will be not only in order but central to the subject of this debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It will be for the Chair to make a ruling when that question arises.

Mr. Kaufman: Perhaps I, too, may respond to my hon. Friend's point of order. The Opposition amendment, which Mr. Speaker selected, makes specific reference to the Government's

"failure to produce a coherent policy towards the Inter-Governmental Conferences"——

plural—

"due to be held next week."

Therefore, any of my right hon. and hon. Friends who want to address the economic and monetary aspects will surely be in order.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), could not we resolve the issue and reach a specific conclusion on economic and monetary union by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) withdrawing the Opposition amendment to allow debate of the alternative amendment concerning constitutional, political and economic significance of the proposals?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House cannot consider altering now the business of the day. I have heard nothing so far that is out of order.

Mr. Kaufman: On the face of it, the new Prime Minister seems to be maintaining the uncompromising attitude displayed by his predecessor. Replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), the Prime Minister said, in a written answer:

"The Government remain opposed to the imposition of a single monetary policy managed by a European Central Bank as prescribed in stage 3 of the Delors report."—*[Official Report,* 3 December 1990; Vol. 182, c *45.]*

That answers a question that was not put, but it nevertheless states the Prime Minister's position. Like most of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks on that and other issues, it is meaningless. The Prime Minister asserts that the Government remain opposed

"to the imposition of a single monetary policy".

However, no one organisation can impose a central bank or a single currency on the United Kingdom. The question is whether a British Conservative Government would accept either or both. The answer is far from clear.

In the rewarding interview that he gave to Mr. Walden, the new Prime Minister himself posed the question:

"Could we accept an independent, non-elected central bank with external control over our domestic monetary situation?"

The right hon. Gentleman provided the answer to his own question:

"My answer to that is that the House of Commons will not accept that at the moment, and I do not think we should concede that at the moment."

Will there be a moment when the Government will concede either or both? We have not received an answer this afternoon.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that specific point?

Mr. Kaufman: No, I have said that I shall not give way again. However, if the Foreign Secretary sought to intervene, I should naturally feel obliged to give way.

The outgoing Prime Minister certainly had an answer to that question. Asked whether she would veto any arrangement that jeopardised the pound sterling, she

replied simply, yes. In that fatal exchange on 30 October that led to the resignation of the deputy Prime Minister, the then Prime Minister was questioned by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)—a former Euro-fanatic who is now a Euro-negativist.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): That was nasty.

Mr. Kaufman: Nasty, but accurate.

The right hon. Member for Devonport has become a kind of clone of the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes)—though happily not yet Cheltenham. His whole vision of the future of British politics to the turn of the century is governed by the burning question of whether Labour will have a candidate running for the Woolwich and Greenwich constituencies at the next general election. The answer to that question is clearly yes.

During questions on the former Prime Minister's statement about the Rome summit, the right hon. Member for Devonport asked whether Britain, if faced with the imposition by treaty of a single currency, would be entitled and right to use the veto. The right hon. Lady replied:

"I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 877.]

Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House what is the Government's position under their new management?

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The Government's policy remains unchanged.

Mr. Kaufman: No, I am talking about the latest Government—who will be in power for a short period yet, and whose Ministers will be attending intergovernmental conferences next week with no policy having been put to the Cabinet, let alone approved by it.

For a little while longer—longer than we hoped, in view of the poll tax time scale offered by the new Secretary of State for the Environment—we have to consider the policies of the present Government. The problem remains that we still do not know what they are. Will the Government use their veto against the imposition of a central bank or a single currency? Answer from the Foreign Secretary comes there none.

That is hardly surprising, because the Government have already accepted the principle of a central bank. Last Sunday, in Monza, the Governor of the Bank of England, Robin Leigh-Pemberton, signed draft statutes for the proposed central bank. He is a Government servant, and it is a nationalised organisation. There was no need for him to do that, yet he did it. In any case, the Government have already made it clear that they do not, in principle, oppose a single currency. As we all know, they have proposed the hard ecu—common currency.

Mr. Cash: The right hon. Gentleman should be accurate. He avoids saying that there is a reserve by the Governor of the Bank of England on those statutes. He is misleading the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have had a lot of bogus points of order. Many hon. Members seek to take part in the debate, and that process is not helped by interventions and bogus points of order.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) has a copy of the statutes. It has been reported in the press—and not denied—that Robin Leigh-Pemberton, as Governor of the Bank of England, signed the statutes. The question is why did he do so, if the Government are not yet committed to a central bank. In any case, the Government have already made it clear that they do not oppose a central currency in principle. They proposed the hard ecu, what they call the common currency—a half-baked nonsense with no future, as was shown by the meeting of Finance Ministers at Monza.

The new Chancellor of the Exchequer was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* after that meeting as follows:

"Mr. Lamont claimed that one other country had shown 'interest' in the British alternative."

How pathetic. I am sure that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office would be in favour, because that country is Spain and he has a great affection and affinity with Spain. A little interest by one out of 11 countries is not exactly encouraging. If Britain is almost entirely alone in espousing the cause of the hard ecu, there is no doubt about how Ministers see its future. In his Mansion house speech as Chancellor, the new Prime Minister said:

"The hard ecu could ultimately evolve towards a single currency."

In an interview with Mr. Jonathan Dimbleby on 25 November, the Prime Minister said:

"The hard ecu could develop into a single currency."

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury—whose survival as a Treasury Minister must have some significance—has gone even further. A couple of months ago he said:

"The hard ecu could easily develop into a single currency."

Speaking to the House of Lords Select Committee a couple of months ago, the Financial Secretary said of the hard ecu policy:

"The next stage of having a single currency could actually happen more quickly by going down this path"—

the path of the hard ecu.

Earlier this year the Foreign Secretary said that the hard ecu plan

"does not rule out a single currency in the longer term".

As for the new Secretary of State for the Environment, he said:

"At last we have recognised that a new central institution is inevitable and that a European currency is likely to come".

Perhaps he would like to talk with the Opposition parties about that.

So, the Government are clearly not opposed to the principle of a single currency. How could they be when they see their own pet notion of a hard ecu leading to that? The game was further given away by the Chancellor at Monza on Sunday when, talking about a central bank, he said:

"We do not see any need for institutions of that kind unless there was a single currency."

Once again the Government are entering the intergovernmental conference on EMU next week with no clear idea of what they are in favour of, or against. They will be jeopardising Britain's interests and the economic and political future of our country because of that imprecision and a lack of any clear policy at that crucial conference.

If the United Kingdom has nothing to propose at those meetings, others will make the running. If the United Kingdom does not put forward proposals for others to consider, accept, modify, vary and compromise with—with the aim of reaching ultimate agreement—that will not stop the other countries from agreeing and going forward, leaving the United Kingdom not only isolated but damaged.

[Mr. Kaufman]

If I and my right hon. Friends were taking part in those conferences, we would go there with clear proposals. We would propose the extension of qualified majority voting in the ministerial Council when we went to the political intergovernmental conference, and for a clearly enhanced role for the European Parliament, as specified in our policy document. We would go to the economic and monetary union intergovernmental conference with proposals for sensible conditions for further economic and monetary progress, in a manner that best serves Britain's long-term interests, and those of the Community. We would propose building on the strength of existing, well-tried institutions, such as ECOFIN, the Economic and Finance Council. We would be arguing for progress to be conditioned by progress on economic convergence. The Prime Minister cannot argue with that, because he has repeatedly spoken about the importance of convergence, for example, in his speech on 20 June, when he launched the hard ecu and said:

"Without greatly increased convergence, monetary union simply would not work."

In an interview in the *Financial Times* a few days ago, he specifically argued for what he called

"the right form of economic convergence"

as a condition for proceeding to a single currency.

The Labour party argues for economic convergence as a necessity for progress on all those issues. We would also be arguing for matters for which the Government show no interest whatever—for growth policies; and for enhanced regional and structural funds. I recognise that the Government laugh at growth, having plunged us into a recession under this Prime Minister. Yes, growth is a joke for the Government; but it is a not a joke for our partners in the Community. We should also be arguing for stronger social policies, including the social charter. We would be arguing for Britain. Instead of arguing for Britain, the Government have spent the past 12 years arguing among themselves. As the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East pointed out in his resignation speech, the consequence has been grave damage to British interests. Having been Foreign Secretary and Chancellor during that period—until he was humiliated by the right hon. Member for Finchley last year—he should know.

The fact is that, even after the change of Prime Minister, the Government have no idea of where they are going on European issues. They have no idea of what they want to do, and no idea of what they intend to say at the intergovernmental conferences. The Cabinet have not discussed it. The promised Cabinet paper has not been produced, and may not be produced. The present Prime Minister and the former Prime Minister have said that they value the House of Commons so much, that its sovereignty is so important, but we have not had a tittle of information to consider today so that we can give the advice of Parliament to Ministers who are going to the intergovernmental conferences in Rome next week to represent this country. The House has had no opportunity to give the Government any clear advice, based on declared Government policy, because there is no Government policy—all there is, is muddle, temporising, patching-up and trying to keep their split party together for a little longer.

The Government have failed the nation on Europe, as on the poll tax, the national health service, education and the economy. The nation wants a new start. It will not get it from a Prime Minister who merely mouths the same old cliches in less memorable words. Britain will get a new start only with a new Government, and that means a Labour Government.

6.8 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I was very glad to hear my right hon. Friend say this afternoon—as he did in the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing yesterday—that there is to be no revolution in Government policy dealing with matters related to the European Community. Indeed, he affirmed that Britain's policy will continue to be based on practical steps towards our proper place in Europe, and proper development in Europe. In short, our policy would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. I am sure that that is the right approach. Anything else would lead to extremely inadequate developments in the European Community.

You have suggested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the question of European monetary union should not be central to the debate, but we cannot avoid discussing it, because monetary union raises fundamental political issues. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, along with others, will discuss those when they go to the European Council, and also at the two intergovernmental conferences that will begin immediately after that.

I do not see the difficulties in which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) seemed to be wallowing. A common currency of a sort already exists, with an inadequate ecu; the markets clearly want a more substantial ecu, which is exactly what the so-called hard ecu will be. It will mean a currency that is managed, and a central institution—the European Monetary Fund—will be set up. That is the policy of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Over the next decade or so, we shall be able to see whether markets and people, customers and industry, really want to proceed to a huge, centalised single currency and monetary policy, to be run by an autonomous central bank. Personally, I doubt it very much: that would go entirely against history, leading to more centralism when what we want is more diffusion and decentralisation.

There is no need, however, for the right hon. Member for Gorton to become obsessed with whether that will happen in 10 years' time. The inner deutschmark zone of Germany, Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Austria and one or two other countries will probably stick together in a kind of union for many years to come; a sort of "multi-speed" arrangement will probably develop, and I do not think that we need spend too much time worrying about it, because we have proposed our own common currency, managed by the European Monetary Fund. That will give everyone in Europe a decade or so to decide whether they want to move on, and, if so, how.

Mr. Spearing: In view of the importance of economic and monetary union—which he has emphasised, despite its omission from the discussion by the Foreign Secretary—does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in accordance with our universal desire for more parliamentary input in European Community matters, a special Select Committee should be appointed to look into the potential benefits of EMU, potential methods of organisation and, perhaps,

some of the risks. Would that not be a wise step, in view of the fact that past Community treaties have sometimes not turned out quite as they were advertised?

Mr. Howell: The Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service has already conducted an inquiry, and will no doubt conduct more; the IGC opening next week is only the beginning of many months—possibly years—of discussion. Existing Select Committees will certainly has the opportunity to look into the matter very closely.

Let me return to the question of political developments in Europe. My party's policy is, very properly, cautious and evolutionary; the Opposition's policy appears, in a sense, to have evolved already. I congratulate them: they have come up with a very clear policy, which some of us had the privilege of glimpsing when we attended the Rome parliamentary conference last week.

I freely confess that, among the Conservatives, there were and remain divided views on how fast and how far we should go with all these complex issues. On the whole, however, we take the view that the calm and common-sense evolutionary approach of my right hon. Friend will allow matters to develop at the right speed. As the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) will no doubt confirm and explain to his Back Benchers, the position in the Labour party was very different. Although one Labour Member—the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), displaying his usual integrity—dissented from the very federalist declaration passed by the parliamentary groups in Rome, I understand that the official Labour party, led by its official spokesman, voted for the full centralised, federalised socialist ticket.

The document to which the party gave full support includes not merely union on a federal basis, but approval for an autonomous central bank, approval for arriving at a single currency, approval for the Commission to become the executive of the entire European union, a vast extension of qualified majority voting, approval for the president of the Commission to be voted in by the European Parliament, approval for the European Parliament's initiation of legislation, a vast extension of the Community's powers over social environmental matters—in fact, the full federal arrangements. Just to ram the point home, the document ends with a call for all those measures to become the official policy of all member Governments and of the forthcoming IGCs. Labour Members voted—openly and, as I appreciate, very bravely—for that as the official policy of their party.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The right hon. Gentleman is making rather less than his usual contribution. As he must know very well, he has produced a complete caricature of the Labour document, which is a united document.

Having labelled the resolution "socialistic", the right hon. Gentleman should take account of some people who supported it and who would reject the application of such a term. This is partly why his party is so isolated in the European Parliament, and on Europe generally: it uses labels that are wholly separate from the major course of the current political developments in Europe.

Mr. Howell: With respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman has got that upside down. What concerns me as we advance in European terms—I freely confess to being pro-Europe—is not the difficulties that we encounter in our enormous task, which is forcing us to face many new issues which we seek honestly to face; what concerns me is the uncritical and facile welcome given to a general, massive centralisation of power in a kind of United States of Europe, something that belongs more to the 18th and 19th centuries than to the 21st. I suppose that, in a way, it is no surprise to me that a socialist Labour party should go along with that.

The details—everything that I have said—appear in the document that I have in my hand, which was fully supported, officially, by the Labour party.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I think that there has been a genuine misunderstanding. It is my clear view that those who went to the so-called assize were speaking entirely for themselves, and could in no way claim to represent either their parties or, even more important, the House of Commons. Responsibility for supporting the shameful propositions listed by the right hon. Gentleman belongs entirely to those people, as individuals.

Mr. Howell: I hate to cross swords with the right hon. Gentleman, for whose views and integrity I have the profoundest respect, but I must regretfully tell him that the picture that he has tried to paint is not the true one. I freely confess that those on my side acted as individuals; indeed, scorn may be poured on us because we did not all go in the same direction. Some were in favour, some were against and some abstained. Labour's official spokesman, however, said that Labour representatives had received word from London that they were authorised to support the document. Let me say in their defence that, when their spokesman supported the document, he expressed some reservations—and, my goodness, reservations are needed, for this is the full, old-fashioned federalist ticket, with no qualifications.

Mr. Anderson: To an extent, the right hon. Gentleman has put the record straight. He should say, however, that his party's representatives—including him—were split three ways; and, having said that we accepted the whole federalist package, he should stress that substantial reservations were expressed by the Labour party spokesman. With the exception of one Member, we spoke with a united voice, while the three-way split among the Conservatives reflected the massive division in the party.

Mr. Howell: This does not bode very well for the future. If a possible Labour Government's approach would be to accept everything, vote for it and then, in one and a half minutes, say that they have some reservations, there is not much hope of them defending the country's interests.

Some of us went to Rome with rather higher hopes than were justified to try to establish and strengthen the role of national Parliaments in the process of European development. That was the real purpose. I am afraid that we did not really get down to that. However, inside the document, among all the generalised federalist aspirations, there are one or two ideas that we should examine further on how this Parliament and other national Parliaments can rightly play their decisive and central role in the future development of Europe and its democratic structure. As I have said, I am afraid that we did not get very far because of the long list of centralising aspirations which had such enthusiastic support from certain quarters.

We need to have a clear way of deciding who does what in the Community, where the powers are to lie and how the

[Mr. Howell]

people who hold the powers will be accountable. Hon. Members who are trying to focus on the central issue should keep reminding themselves and others that we do not see this as a matter of tiers and pyramids, with the Community institutions being a higher tier and the national Parliaments being a lower tier.

I reject the analysis, even of distinguished people such as commissioners in Brussels, when they grandly talk about subsidiarity meaning that the big strategic issues will be held by something called the Community and that lower levels will manage national affairs. That is the wrong way of seeing things. There is no superior or inferior body in the future structure. Powers and functions may be handled at different levels and that may change over time because nothing is fixed about the arrangements. We must remember, as must our friends in the European Parliament and officials in the Community institutions, that the Community is at our disposal. It is not the master. The nation states are the fundamental units of politics and any question of powers must be settled on that basis.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): I am listening carefully to my right hon. Friend's interesting speech. He referred to the term "nation state". Is he aware of a remark made not long ago by the recently deceased Andrei Sakharov, who was a great man, a great political leader and one of the greatest scientists? One of his last remarks was that there is no problem facing the modern world that can any longer be solved by the nation state.

Mr. Howell: That is fine, and it diverts me fascinatingly, because that man was a sad child of a gigantic empire that is far too large and is now falling apart. We in Europe are thinking in rather different terms. I shall come back to why the nation state, far from belonging to the 19th century, may be the appropriate administrative unit for the 21st century. I am talking about the nation state as we understand it and not as it was understood by the poor harassed Soviet citizens and the heroes who sought to dissent from the Stalinist empire.

The guiding principle that we are offered to try to sort out who does what at which level has been the matter of subsidiarity. Some of my hon. Friends and people throughout the European Community have rightly pointed out that there are real practical difficulties in pinning that down and defining it. If one tries to put it into the preamble of the treaties, which is proposed in the declaration supported by the Labour party, there will be problems about how it is judged and how it is made justiciable in the courts. There is always the difficulty that, if it is the European Court that makes the judgments, there will be a drift towards the centre, the judgments will be in favour of a central power and we will not have got much further in ensuring that the centralising tendencies of European affairs are countered by proper democratic forces. Therefore, subsidiarity is difficult; we cannot simply say, "Fine, put it in the treaty." We must do much more work, and perhaps Britain can contribute to the work of trying to bring home the enormous practical difficulties of giving it a legal sense and definition.

The central issue for this Parliament must be accountability. It was at the conference in Rome that I and some of my hon. Friends tried to put forward some ideas as to how the affairs of the European Community, the decisions of the Council of Ministers and the activities of the Commission could be made much more accountable and democratic. We have done more in this Parliament through parliamentary scrutiny. The hon. Member for Newham, South has set a towering example of energy and application with his Committee in showing how parliamentary scrutiny can be extended. I greatly admire him for that. We can do that, and other Parliaments throughout Europe should do the same. We can seek to have earlier information and an opportunity to discuss issues before they are, as it were, cooked and baked into policy, so that the sensation of being bounced and having a ready-made policy from Brussels delivered on our plate can be ameliorated.

One suggestion is that, when the presidency changes every six months, it should circulate its intentions to all member Parliaments, so that they can be discussed. Another suggestion is that the Commission should put forward its annual work programme in great detail for member Parliaments to discuss. Another possibility, which we have all analysed, is that the European Parliament and national Parliaments should work much closer together. That is right but, as I have said, the European Parliament is not the centre of all this but merely a part of the democratic procedure. This is not a federal Government, so the European Parliament could not play the sole role in filling the so-called democratic deficit.

I do not feel happy about the idea—again, it is apparently official Labour party policy—that the European Parliament should initiate legislation. I can see all sorts of difficulties in that. We want our colleagues in the European Parliament to be more effective in controlling Community expenditure. They are able and equipped to do that. It may be that a degree of co-decision between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament is desirable, but that is for us to decide here. Perhaps we should seek an inter-parliamentary agreement stipulating minimum standards of scrutiny, control forewarning and advance information required by all national Parliaments in the Community so that there is effective input and control from national level.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned his friends in the European Parliament. Is it not true that the majority of Conservative Members of the European Parliament supported the Rome document which the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) has referred to as socialistic?

Mr. Howell: I said that Conservative Members had different ideas about it; I did not disguise the differences of view. It is a bit of a curate's egg and, like the curate's egg, it is excellent in parts. My judgment remains—it will be shared by many in the Labour party—that it is a pretty hot federalist stew. It remains a matter of amazement that the Opposition Front Bench representives should put their imprimatur upon it. They had their reasons, and no doubt they will be explained later; however, it looks a little odd.

We should be concentrating on seeking to bring true and reassuring democracy to the European process. There is a place in that for the Community institutions and the European Parliament. There is also a vital place for national Parliaments. We are closer to people. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that we need political reform. We need such reform in the United

Kingdom as well, and I have no doubt that we will get some. We need reform that spreads and does not centralise power.

We need reform that reverses, not accelerates, the drift to the centre that is bound to go on. Everyone in Brussels can see that it is going on. It needs to embrace and not reject the new democracies of eastern Europe and the new applicants. I agree with the right hon. Member for Gorton about the position of Austria. Above all, we need political reform that refreshes and does not suffocate and stifle national identities and national differences and diversities. Those must be the guiding principles, not those sometimes reflected in the sort of document to which I have referred.

I am sorry if I have taken a long time, but there have been many interruptions. I apologise for detaining the House so long.

Such political reform should be rooted in nation states, not—I emphasise this to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd)—because nation states are part of the old order that Mr. Sakharov feared but because they are part of the new order and because they provide a sensible administrative unit—a comfortable size of administrative power—in this age of global generalities and mega-organisations and institutions, which many people feel to be extremely remote from them.

Those are the principles that I believe and offer to my hon. Friends as the ones that we should enshrine in our approach to political reform in Europe. As with monetary reform, to which our evolutionary approach is correct, all we need is the intellectual vigour and power to persuade others who are ready and open to persuasion that this is the sensible way forward.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I very much hope that right hon. and hon. Members will exercise more restraint in the length of their speeches; otherwise, some of them will be disappointed.

6.30 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is one of the most important debates on the European Community that we have held. It comes immediately ahead of the two major conferences—the intergovernmental conferences on economic and monetary union and on political union.

The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who chairs the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs with such distinction, will recall that earlier this year the Select Committee published a report on what was happening in Europe and the enormous changes that were taking place. We must consider what is happening in some perspective, so I should like to begin my remarks by quoting two short passages from that report. We said:

"We should not underestimate the continued strength of the momentum for the move towards federal objectives . . . There may be varying tactical shifts and differences of detail, but the old objective of a federal Europe is being reinforced at the highest official and political levels."

The concluding paragraph said:

"It is clear to us that the Community now developing is very different from the Community that the UK joined in the 1970s."

And it is. The Europe that we joined in 1973 was still basically a "Europe des patries"—a Europe of independent nation states determined to co-operate to achieve a common European goal. The Europe that the two intergovernmental conferences wish to create is a supranational quasi-federal union in which major decisions are taken no longer by national Parliaments and Governments but by Community institutions.

Many tributaries of feeling and experience have led to this great and remarkable surge in favour of European union. In Spain and Portugal, the long experience of fascist and authoritarian rule led their people and politicians to believe that their democracies could be made secure only within a larger democratic union. In Italy, the weakness of the state and the extent of public mistrust in the Government in Rome has led most Italian political leaders to the belief that they are likely to be better governed from Brussels than from the capital of their own country. France, which has long been the champion of national independence in the European Community, has radically changed its stance, motivated basically by its fear of a united Germany and its wish to enmesh its great economic power and that of the Bundesbank in European decision-making. No doubt that is what the Lilliputians thought about binding Gulliver with cords. Meanwhile, the Germans are anxious to assure the world that they see their future not in national but in European terms.

A great melée of different sources of inspiration are moving in the same direction. The supranational institutions of the Community—the Commission and the European Parliament have always been supranational—are, as always, anxious to extend their own decision-making powers. Hon. Members, and certainly the Government, have fed those unionist ambitions and created new opportunities by agreeing, in the Single European Act, to a substantial increase in majority voting in the Council of Ministers and to the commitment to European monetary union in a foolishly written preamble from which we are now desperately trying to escape.

We have not been helped by the assize to which the right hon. Member for Guildford referred. I very much fear that Members of Parliament from other countries who attended that assize between 27 and 30 November might have gained a false impression about the position of those who attended it and the extent to which they spoke for Members of Parliament generally. I must draw attention to some of the extraordinary passages in the meeting's final declaration. Paragraph 2 says that it

"Takes the view that EMU must be achieved on the basis of the timetable and conditions agreed by the European Council in Rome on 27/28 October 1990".

They accept that timetable, which as I recall is 1994 for the second stage, and then onwards as quickly as possible to the third stage with a full single currency and economic and monetary union. The declaration continues:

"Political union comprising a foreign and security policy on matters of common interest must be established and that European Political Cooperation must be incorporated into the Treaty . . .

Takes the view that the Community should be given additional competence in the field of the environment and that decision-making in this area should be by qualified voting . . .

Considers that the time is right to transform the entire complex of relations between the Member States into a European Union on the basis of a proposal for a constitution . . .

Calls for meetings of the Council . . . to act by majority voting except in connection with amendments to the Treaties, the accession of new member states."

That is an extraordinary and outrageous commitment.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): The right hon. Gentleman is right—it is an extraordinary commitment. I assume that he is aware that Conservative Members who attended the assize as individual Members of Parliament representing their constituencies—a perfectly proper thing to do—distinctly heard the Opposition spokesman not only vote for the list that the right hon. Gentleman has just read out but declare that it was Labour party policy. What has he to say to that?

Mr. Shore: I think that I know the answer. The only part that has appeared in a Labour party document is that relating to qualified majority voting on environmental issues. The other propositions cannot be found in any policy document of the Labour party.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): It would be advisable for my right hon. Friend to have a word with me before jumping to conclusions and accepting some of the propaganda being put out. What the Minister said was entirely untrue and wrong. When I spoke on behalf of some of the Labour Members who attended the meeting, I made it absolutely clear that we had severe reservations about some of the points in the text, which I identified and many of which were made by my right hon. Friend. May I point out—I am as careful as my right hon. Friend about Labour party policy—that a decision has been made subsequent to the policy document which was passed by the conference? The national executive committee endorsed the Dublin declaration made earlier this year by the leaders of the socialist parties. Many of the points that were part of that declaration were part of the Dublin declaration, to which our party is committed.

Mr. Shore: I take seriously what my hon. Friend has to say—except, of course, his remark that I might have consulted him. He might have consulted all of us before he went to Rome and after he came back. I content myself by advising him to read with care the extracts that I quoted. Apart from the environmental issue, they are clearly and definitely not part of Labour policy.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Shore: I am sorry; I need to make progress.

All the points so far have been the small change of the debate and we want to get on to the serious subject of what we are facing in Europe. I used the quotations as an illustration of the powerful forces which, in Europe today, are trying to bring about a federal European union. It does not matter how they describe it and we could have a long debate about what federal union is. The aim is, above all, a union which goes far beyond the "Europe des patries" that we thought we had joined 17 years ago.

We should judge the current proposals for European monetary union and for political union against the background of the thrust in Europe towards union. The content of the proposals is aimed not so much at solving the practical problems that have arisen, but at furthering the cause of European union. Let us consider, for example, the argument in favour of economic and monetary union. It is said—by those who advocate it, of course—that it will help currency stability, that it will help to deal with the familiar problems of currency speculation and that it will introduce a strong anti-inflation bias into the economies of the member countries.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Hear, hear.

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend may say that, but I must point out that the same objectives were followed and the same claims were made on behalf of the exchange rate mechanism. It was said that that would have an impact on inflation and would stop currency speculation. We are entitled to ask what the special virtue of economic and monetary union is over the exchange rate mechanism. The only serious point that I have been able to find is references to the so-called "great savings" in transaction costs. Transaction costs were virtually unknown in the House until the Delors report appeared a year or so ago.

I want to quote from a speech by Karl Otto Pöhl, who is something of an authority on banking matters, on transaction costs and on the contribution that European monetary union would make towards a great saving. On 3 September 1990, he said:

> "The repeated references to alleged huge savings in transaction costs for the countries of a single currency area are not in the least convincing."

I take it that he has a fairly serious opinion in these matters.

What is the real reason for going beyond the exchange rate mechanism into European monetary union? It was stated by Mr. Andreotti, the President of the Council of Ministers, during the six months of the Italian presidency. He said to the European Parliament on 21 November:

> "for the first time in the history of Europe, we shall confer upon the Community one of the distinctive and essential competencies on which national sovereignty is historically built."

That is the prize and that is the objective. European monetary union is not primarily about solving economic problems, but about transferring to the Community something that is central and indispensable to what he calls "national sovereignty" and I call parliamentary democracy and the accountability of Government to the people of this land.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the fact that he had not heard of transactional costs before the Delors report came out shows his remarkable personal ignorance of business and industry? If he had ever tried to import or export anything, he would have known all too well what transactional costs were.

Mr. Shore: This is too small a point about which to bicker. I am very familiar with the phrase "transactional costs", which has become a central argument for the merits —so-called—of joining the European monetary union. That is why I have brought the matter forward for discussion and that is why I quoted Herr Pöhl's comments.

The thrust to European union colours and distorts all judgment on the approach to economic and monetary union. I fear that the Government are in for a difficult time. While they are trying to argue for a rational economic policy, they will find themselves up against that overt thrust, as Andreotti made plain in his address to the European Parliament.

I fear that we shall face the same problem at the conference on political union. We know that the Commission, the European Parliament and the Governments of Italy, of Spain and of Germany are strongly in favour of four objectives. They want a certain concept of subsidiarity to be adopted in the treaties themselves. They do not want from subsidiarity what this House would like from subsidiarity. We want the

interpretation of subsidiarity to lead to the minimum of supranational control or intervention in our affairs. They want the concept to be included for the opposite reason, so that they can then argue the case for taking more powers away from national Parliaments and from national democracies. That concept is dangerous and it would be even more dangerous if it were introduced into a treaty which also gave powers of interpretation either to a court or to a majority of the Council. If that were to happen, we should find ourselves wide open to the ever-increasing encroachment of European law on our national life.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not true that the problem with the European Court already is that it is highly political? Its role is to interpret in a political sense whether countries are complying with the treaty. This country is not used to accepting that concept.

Mr. Shore: That is right. The European Court has been an emblem of centralism, as my hon. Friend has suggested. That is part of the reason why we coined the phrase "the creeping competence" of the Community. That comment was based on the extension of the powers of intervention of the Community as a result of rulings in the European Court.

Those who favour political union want to give the European Parliament legislative powers and they want to extend the competence of the treaties into foreign affairs and security, and into a wider and ever-growing area of social policy. However, the heart of the matter is the pressure to extend majority voting in the Council of Ministers. That view has been expressed in the Commission's report, in the European Parliament submission and in the wretched assize. Why are they so keen on that? The reason is that it would disarm the national democracies.

We can influence our Ministers, but if they do not exercise the right of veto through the unanimity rule, they can be constantly outvoted in the Council of Ministers. As an increasing number of areas of policy are brought within majority voting, those who favour such change say, "The democratic deficit is getting bigger and bigger—we must have more and more powers so that we can rectify the loss of democracy which we, in our folly, allowed to take place by transferring the powers to the Europeans in the first place." The right way to deal with the democratic deficit is not to give more decisions to majority voting, but to take some of them back. I hope that that proposal will be given due consideration.

What should we do on 14 December? I wholly accept what the Foreign Secretary said about playing our full part, about seeking to persuade, and about having certain proposals to put forward. They sounded reasonably innocuous, and that is right. I am sure that we should seek to persuade, not just hector and lecture. That would be very much better—in the end it would pay off. We have to face clearly what, after all our best endeavours in respect of EMU and political union, we shall do if we find ourselves either in a minority or alone. We have to be prepared for that. I do not necessarily forecast it—I hope that it will not occur—but if it does, we must stand up.

Some people say that if we opt out from the proposals, either alone or with others, we shall be condemned to a second tier or to a two-speed Europe, or that we shall abandon the high ground. They are intoxicated by their own inaccurate metaphors. The real analogy is far closer. Suppose we did not have a common agricultural policy and that we are to have an intergovernmental conference to establish a CAP this December. The EMU proposals alone are 10 times more damaging to the interests of the British people than the CAP. Would we stand alone and say to the rest of Europe, "Go ahead with your CAP; we do not agree; we are in with the rest of the matters which join us together in the Rome treaty and accession to it, but not with the CAP." We would be very pleased to have stood out and stood our ground. I very much hope that that will be the position not only of the Government but of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

6.51 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): In my first speech from the Back Benches for 10 years, I take this opportunity to say what a great privilege it was to serve for so long in the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). I am particularly pleased to have been able to play a small part in taking through Parliament the Electricity Bill, which resulted yesterday in an estimated 6 million people applying for shares. That is a huge success by any standards and a shining example for other European countries. *[Interruption.]* Even my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) was queuing for shares.

It is now pretty well common ground in Britain that we should press forward fast with the creation of a single European common market. Well over half our trade is with the European Community, and it is in the direct interest of the jobs and prosperity of our citizens that Britain should thrive within that Community. Indeed, it has been Britain's position in Europe for many years that we wish to see a free market trading openly with the rest of the world. This country also leads the way in welcoming the potential expansion of the EC to include the nations of what used to be called the eastern bloc.

The argument about Europe, at least in this country, is not about the pace at which we remove barriers to trade —the quicker the better for most of us—but about the character and development of the financial, monetary and political mechanisms which are thought to be necessary for the European market. As the discussion moves from the trade market to the mechanisms of finance, so the questions have less to do with co-operation and more to do with supranational and potentially undemocratic controls.

In my view, it is distracting, if not absurd, to contemplate a single currency for Europe run by an unelected central bank before we have begun properly to sort out the workings of the single market. With many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I shall certainly play my part in ensuring that that remains the view of the British Government, especially in the days ahead in Rome. I was relieved by what I read into what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said on that matter.

I now refer to a European matter which is even more immediate and pressing than EMU—the exchange rate mechanism. Our entry into the ERM was welcomed by both sides of the House and by most of the press, but it is clear now that the bands within which the pound is allowed to float are sustained only by damagingly high rates of interest in Britain. That means, for instance, that German industry in recent months has enjoyed a 50 per cent. advantage over its British competitors in terms of the cost of its borrowings and investments.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

Even with those differences in interest rates, highly disadvantageous as they are to our industry and commerce, the pound is falling towards the bottom of the band. There is, therefore, a case for arguing either that United Kingdom interest rates are too low to sustain the band or that the ERM bands are themselves too high. Far from believing that interest rates are too low, I have been concerned for many months about the level of interest rates and, from time to time, have expressed anxieties in writing to colleagues. In February—nine months ago—I wrote:

"There must be a danger now of a demand squeeze turning into a real threat to supply side confidence. There seems now to be a lag of about two years between a major change of interest rate levels and investment rates.

Seven months later—in September—I wrote again:

"I have been asking myself again why it is that the UK continues to suffer worse swings of 'stop-go' economic cycles than any of our competitors, with more serious effects in particular on business confidence.

The answer I believe continues to be that our economic and monetary authorities have less of an appreciation than others of the lags in the economy in particular between changes in interest policy and business investment.

They tend, as they have done for the past fifty years, to respond to the events of the day without projecting forward the effects of their policies for the necessary 18-24 months. These policies are therefore alternatively more severe and more lax than is required.

Thus, for instance, high interest rates, introduced when the economy was already entering a downswing (and when inflationary forces were mostly caused by a slowdown of productivity increases) will begin seriously to bite as the economy enters a recession next year.

The two arguments against reducing interest rates are now 1) inflation and 2) the pound. Inflation will be brought under control by the emerging recession. A pound related to genuine market conditions is surely what is required for our balance of payments. For this reason I have been convinced for some months that interest rates are too high and that they should start to be reduced at once."

All of that was written before we entered the ERM. There are those who argue that if we now renegotiate the ERM bands, as I believe that we should, and thus devalue the pound, we shall stir up the embers of inflation, but I do not believe that. It would be true only if there existed the purchasing power here greatly to expand more expensive imports, which will clearly not be the case in the economically difficult months ahead. Despite the recent peculiar figures for consumer credit, the retail market is plainly in the doldrums and likely to remain there for the time being.

Others argue that the German mark will itself collapse as Germany sorts out its eastern half. It would, of course, make matters worse from our point of view if Germany responded by raising her interest rates. It would be ironic indeed if British industry had to pay the cost of German unification through high interest rates. The French are already beginning to grumble at that prospect as it dawns on them that Germany may choose high interest rates in preference to increasing taxes on her own people. For the United Kingdom, the hard probability is that if we are to reduce interest rates from their present dangerously high levels, and under the existing European financial mechanism the pressure may actually be upwards, we shall have to renegotiate the ERM band to a lower median level of the pound against the deutschmark.

Now is precisely the time to do it, while a new Prime Minister and a new Chancellor of the Exchequer are enjoying a honeymoon period at home and abroad. Should they wish to do so, they would be able in their negotiations to offer to reduce the range of the banding to the narrow 2·25 per cent. The alternative to such negotiations is high and probably rising interest rates at home. Those would, next year, turn a recession into a severe slump. The consequence of that would be the almost certain electoral defeat of my party at the next general election.

As a former deputy chairman of my party, I have never waivered in my belief that the economic cycle, and not such issues as the community charge, is the real and probably exclusive determinant of election results. What matters in politics is economics. Conservative Administrations have made historic improvements to the supply side of the economy. We must not now put all of that at risk by compelling British industry and commerce to compete unfairly through a combination of high interest rates and artificially high exchange rates, brought together within the present banding levels of the pound in the European exchange rate mechanism.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation.

7 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Although I shall be putting a view that is not generally popular in the House, as I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, I shall not give way. I normally give way, because I believe in doing so. I appreciate the necessity for a time limit on speeches, although it means that we become like the continental hemicycles that we criticise for lending themselves to setpiece speeches.

It is about time, too, that the Front-Bench speakers in this place took their share of the limitation on time. I am sure that the House would not have suffered greatly if the one minute less than three quarters of an hour which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) took had been cut by half.

I, too, was at the assize in Rome. I found it a remarkable and inspiring occasion. I was enormously impressed by the general enthusiasm expressed by the representatives—they were very much representatives—of the political movements from all our partner countries in the Community.

The right hon. Member for Gorton complained because, he said, the Government did not know where they were going. I assure the House that Liberal Democrats know where we are going. We also know where we stand, and, what is more, we are not split. Indeed, the Liberal leaders in Berlin, when meeting on 23 November, urged, among other things,

"the Intergovernmental Conferences convened in December 1990 to take substantial steps towards transforming the Community into a genuine European Union based on a constitution of a federal type."

That was part of the declaration of the assize, as hon. Members who were there will appreciate.

I fail to understand what all the objections and fears about federalism mean. After all, federalism represents a democratic limitation on central power, not the other way

round. I am continually amazed by the apparent new conversion of Conservative Members, in particular, to the idea of decentralisation.

The Labour view, expressed over three quarters of an hour, boiled down in many respects to continually asking the Government when they would use their veto. There was a negativism about the speech of the right hon. Member for Gorton.

The Government view is that by day we will order a suit from a Bruges tailor, but by night we will slip into dungarees, make a few quick changes and hope that nobody notices. I am left wondering precisely where the Government stand. I notice, for example, that a friend of the Government, Mr. Jacques Chirac, reported in the *Financial Times* this morning, in launching a new party policy document, said:

"We refuse the conception of the French Socialists, as well as of the Germans and of the Italians"—

doubtless he could have mentioned a number of others—

"for a federation of the Twelve."

He went on to talk about

"an intergovernmental union of European nations."

Is that what the Government want?

I do not have time to express in detail the Liberal Democratic view, but following the meeting on 23 November to which I referred, those attending said:

"the Intergovernmental Conferences should make a qualatitive leap forward to democracy by granting full co-decision powers to the directly elected European Parliament in all areas of Community legislation, with Council, when acting in its legislative capacity, deciding in public and by qualified majority."

I do not have time to develop that point.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) considers those to be shameful declarations. There is nothing shameful about them. I accept that the concept is different, but it is a searching after democracy. We in this House are not all that accountable. We in this country do not apply subsidiarity particularly well. Was the poll tax in Scotland, on the basis of 28 per cent. of the vote and only 10 out of 72 Members of Parliament, an example of the operation of subsidiarity, a concept for which Conservative Members seem suddenly to have developed an enormous affection? I do not think so.

On enlargement, I have time only to agree with the view on Austria, although, in the view of the eastern countries and, I believe, the Scandinavians, we should not hold back the greater coherence of the European Community. Indeed, they would approve of it. We Liberal Democrats also accept references to foreign affairs, defence and security and we believe that in the end those will be European Community responsibilities. A Labour party document commented:

"A military role for the EC would make the position of Ireland as a neutral country very difficult—and make it impossible for Austria, Switzerland and Sweden, as neutral countries, to join."

Why are they neutral, and between whom are they neutral? The neutrality agreement is dead, because the cold war is dead. In Ireland, Fine Gael is already asking for a re-examination of those questions.

I do not have time to deal with the question of European monetary union. The issue is how to share sovereignty properly in a different world, and it certainly is a different world in which we are now living. We often talk about the sovereignty of this House. Hon. Members who want to maintain the status quo frequently talk about it.

In reality, a strong party system based on a truly unrepresentative and divisive electoral system has created sovereign Governments who, when in office, do their will without much regard for Parliament. We want the citizen to have greater sovereignty; or, as the Leader of the Liberal Democrats said on Tuesday:

"The European debate must stop being one about the power of nations, and start to be one about the entitlements of the citizen."

Liberal Democrats—Liberals generally—are about individuals and individual freedom. We naturally think that way.

The issue is not only London and Brussels. It is London and Edinburgh, London and Cardiff and York and Bristol. We were happy to co-operate with the Labour party in the Scottish convention, and that represented a relevant issue. It was an important illustration of the need to re-examine the nature of how we are governed, not only without but within the United Kingdom.

That does not only mean accepting that we can no longer do certain things alone at the European level. It means looking at subsidiarity internally, breaking down the centralisation of Whitehall and giving power back to the peoples in the old nations and regions of the United Kingdom. It also involves seeing whether in some areas the link need not be London to Brussels but Edinburgh, Cardiff and so on to Brussels.

We are in a period of great change. I do not agree with the Foreign Secretary when he says that there is no ineluctability—there is an ineluctable movement and we must ask ourselves how we should handle it because it will change the nature of the nation state. In that moment, Liberal Democrats will argue throughout for giving the individual citizen greater freedom and influence. That can be done within the frame of the ideas set out in the assize and argued in our policy statements on the European Community.

7.10 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Due to the time constraints under which we are labouring, I hope that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) will forgive me for not following his points, except to say that his contribution highlighted the diversity of opinion that understandably exists in the House. As is well recognised, that diversity spreads across and within our parties. Another feature of European affairs debates, as all of us who are regular attenders understand, is that the individual contributors are not at the centre of gravity of their party, but tend for the most part to reflect the extreme views of either position. There is a great mass of opinion in our party that should be more widely represented, but sadly is not.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to continuity on the part of the Conservative party. It is a perfectly understandable and fair debating point for Opposition politicians to suggest that there is a lack of continuity. However, in that regard, the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) is underestimated. In a debate on the subject on 19 December 1988, I suggested that the Government would do well to take down from the archives a memorandum that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley put to her fellow Heads of Government in the European Community in 1984.

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

We learn from the press that there is discussion about whether there should be another Government paper about our attitude to European Community affairs. Whether or not there is to be another one, I recommend Ministers to re-read the 1984 statement of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley. In it, she said:

"responding to the needs and aspirations of its 270 million inhabitants"—

of the Community before its enlargement—

"means giving greater depth to the Community in both its internal and external activities."

It continued by saying that we had

"only just begun to take advantage of its"—

the Community's—

"great potential."

The memorandum stated that there was a need to

"create the sense of common purpose and momentum needed to . . . defend our collective interests in an increasingly troubled world; fulfill our international responsibility to the causes of freedom, democracy, prosperity and peace."

It went on to talk about the need to develop a genuine common market and the intra-Community trade that we have seen in the evolution of the Single European Act and the Community market to which we are now moving, and to which the Government have made such a contribution.

The memorandum said that the common agricultural policy—a familiar target—needed

"a continuing effort to correct the distortions."

As we well recognise, that effort continues to be needed. In the industrial sector, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley called for

"action on a Community basis rather than nationally"

and

"better co-operation on research and development."

She continued:

"Many environmental problems require action going beyond the capabilities of individual Member States."

My right hon. Friend showed the great foresight and vision for which she is noted. Some six years ago, she spotted environmental problems and the contribution that the Community could make to help solve them.

My right hon. Friend said that our objective must be

"to aim beyond the common Commercial Policy through Political Co-operation towards a common approach to external affairs . . . The growth of Political Co-operation enables the members of the Community increasingly to adopt common positions on world problems . . . we must be ready in Europe to make progress towards the liberalisation of our trading practices, and to play a full part in strengthening the GATT trading system."

How sad it is to reflect on that objective in the light of the events of the past few days in Brussels. Let us hope that progress can be made there.

The penultimate paragraph of my right hon. Friend's memorandum stated:

"Periodic expressions of pessimism about the future of the Community have never turned out to be justified. Europe needs to advance its internal development. The progress that has been made towards 'an ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe' of which the Treaty of Rome speaks in its first paragraph is unlikely to be reversed."

That is the objective and aim on which we are set.

I do not believe that we shall ever be talking about a United States of Europe based on the model of that in north America. I simply do not know—no one knows—what we shall have achieved in 10 or 50 years. I know that it will be a difficult and exciting time, different from anything that exists, or has existed, in history. I also know that if this part of the globe, western Europe, is to achieve the stability, prosperity and security to which we and our constituents aspire, it will be crucial for Britain to play an active part in the process.

I strongly welcome the words of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, that our position should be on the playing field, participating. We shall certainly take part in the two intergovernmental conferences. The first one is on the institutions—we must find a more constructive role for the European Parliament. Due to the constraints of time, I cannot elaborate on what its role may be, but at present that Parliament is not efficiently or sufficiently used.

I shall offer a few principles on European monetary union. We should all approach with an open mind what will undoubtedly be long and complex negotiations. Although our 12 countries have been working together and have geographical continuity, nevertheless we are still different economically, socially and in many other significant ways. Therefore, any form of moving together in close co-operation will take a long time, and we should recognise that. It may well be that the hard ecu could make a contribution as a common currency. I am not convinced of that—none of us can be sure—but it is a strong possibility. In good time, it may turn out to be a stepping stone to a single currency. We should not shy away from what some people regard as a threat of a single currency.

The advantages of a single currency must be obvious. When, before 1914, our forefathers enjoyed with the gold standard what was, in effect, a single currency, no one was frightened about the threat to sovereignty. Our predecessors did not believe that the sovereignty of Parliament or the nation was threatened because we enjoyed the single currency of the gold standard. Moving towards a single currency will be hugely difficult, but the difficulties will not be so much for this country as between whatever colossus Germany develops into and Greece at the other extreme—we are somewhere in between. I believe that we can live with that.

I suspect that some hon. Members who are frightened of a single currency do not believe in the economic capacity and potential of our country. I do not share that pessimism. I believe that we can look our European partners in the face and live with it. A great help towards moving to a common currency would be the introduction of an independent central bank. It is significant that almost the first act of the Attlee Government after 1945 was the nationalisation of the Bank of England. We have privatised everything else, but we have not yet privatised that. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) for his views on this matter.

I do not feel that I am losing my Englishness or Britishness as we move towards closer union, whatever that may be. The French are not losing their Frenchness, and I have no fear that we shall lose our Britishness.

7.20 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): To those of us who were around in this House in 1972—a dwindling band, unfortunately—and who voted during the debates when the United Kingdom first acceded to the treaty of Rome, these further debates on the EC begin to have a familiar ring. One of the characteristics of those earlier debates was a certain lack of candour and clarity on the part of the pro-marketeers and of the Government of the day. There

were echoes of that in today's speech by the Foreign Secretary, particularly when he came to deal with economic and monetary union and with political union.

In 1972, there a was a failure to recognise that accession to the treaty of Rome was the first step leading to an act of union. The second step is economic and monetary union, and the third, intertwined with it, is political union. The EC is all about moving eventually towards political union—a European Parliament with full powers and a European Government of some sort. The exact form that that Government would take has not yet been thought through.

Since we signed the treaty, more powers have been transferred from Westminster and Whitehall to Brussels. I shall not talk about sovereignty—it is a dirty word these days, and a peculiarly British concept, we are told, relating to the House of Commons; and the Europeans do not understand it—so let us talk about political power. That power has gradually been transferred over the past 18 years—by 1992, it will be 20 years—from here to Brussels, largely to unelected, undemocratic bodies.

No British Government could now reimpose exchange controls, for instance. Our ability to control our trade policy is extremely limited, as the GATT negotiations have shown. Our ability to control agricultural policy is also extremely limited, as is our ability to restructure our industry without the—increasingly grudging—consent of Brussels.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) becomes Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he will find that one of his hands is already tied behind his back, and in a few years' time, if these proposals go through, the other hand will be similarly tied.

In the past two weeks, the City, having clamoured to join the European monetary system, has begun to clamour for interest rate cuts—when the pound is bumping along at the bottom of its EMS band and the Government dare not reduce interest rates. That restriction, although incomplete, is nevertheless a restriction on our control of monetary policy.

Substantial powers are still left: powers over taxation, over the Budget, over borrowing and over public expenditure. But if these plans for economic and monetary union go ahead, those powers will go too, transferred to institutions in the EC.

The single European currency is not about whose head, or how many heads, should be on the coinage. It signifies a single monetary policy, a single economic policy and eventually a single Parliament and Government. If that comes about, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will be bound hand and foot at the Treasury, trying to run British economic policy.

Whatever the technical merits of the ecu, and it has some—it is quite a clever dodge—it is a dead duck, not because of technicalities or economics but because the whole movement towards a single currency does not want 13 currencies: it wants one. That is why there is no chance, whatever the economic arguments favouring the ecu, of it succeeding. The single currency is not only about economics, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said; it is mainly about politics and political union.

The central bank will be a European Bundesbank, governed by the same sort of statutes as govern the real Bundesbank. Were it anything else, the Germans would not agree to it. It is no good pretending that there will be control by Ministers. One of Delors's reports mentions accountability. The new governor of the central bank would have to go along to the European Parliament twice a year to give a report, but the idea advanced by some that the Council of Ministers or a Committee thereof could control monetary policy of the central bank shows that those who hold the idea are living in cloud-cuckoo-land.

In this country, the Chancellor or the Prime Minister calls in the Governor to No. 10 or No. 11; interest rate policy is discussed; and the Government make the decision. In France, the governor is not even consulted—he may be now, but he certainly was not before. The Ministry of Finance decides. Even in Germany, when the political pressures were on, Herr Pöhl, who likes to see himself as the great custodian of monetary discipline, agreed to offer one west mark for one east mark—a purely political act. But when we have a European central bank, the 12 Finance Ministers will not be able to apply that sort of pressure. The bank will be even more independent than the Bundesbank.

With monetary union, there will have to be economic convergence. That will be disastrous for the weaker areas of Britain—of Wales, of Scotland and of the north of England—and for countries such as Spain, Greece and Portugal. A massive transfer of funds will be needed to try to restore the balance. Where will the money come from? The MacDougal report in 1977, issued before the enlargement of the Community, estimated that, in a federal Europe, about 25 per cent. of the EC's gross national product would have to go into its budget. The figure now is 1 per cent.

Who on earth will contribute these vast funds to facilitate economic and monetary union without its damaging the weaker regions? Will the German taxpayer pay? I doubt it, given all the problems of east Germany, eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Will French taxpayers pay? Perhaps the plan is to impose a Euro income tax—the final erosion of our ability to raise the income tax that we want to raise.

The final stage will be political union, but by then that will come easily. Once all these other elements have fallen into place, political union will be bound to come. Once economic control has been taken away from nation states, there will be political union. If this momentum continues, we may be in that position by the year 2000.

The Foreign Secretary was reported in *The Guardian* as having said that he would not agree to turning Westminster into a body resembling Oxfordshire county council. Perhaps that analogy goes too far. A better analogy is provided by the German Lander. If all these plans go through, British control over economic policy will be no greater than the control exercised by a German Lander or a regional assembly anywhere else. Those who favour these movements, and the Government, have a duty to be frank and to tell the British people what is happening so that they can make up their own minds. This matter must never again be swept under the carpet because that is extremely dangerous. It is not a technical or an economic matter, but is at the heart of political control. From my experience of debates, and of events in 1972, I am not optimistic that we will get the candour and clarity that we deserve.

7.30 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I am grateful for this opportunity to take part in a debate that seeks to understand where we are going in Europe. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) said that we should try to tell the British people where we are going. That is enormously difficult in view of the plethora of organisations that we have to discuss and the initials that must be understood.

Originally, the British people talked about the Common Market and sort of understood what it meant. Now the EEC has become the EC and we talk about single and common currencies, the ecu, the hard ecu, EMU, GATT, EFTA, NATO, the North Atlantic Assembly, the Council of Europe and the WEU. That makes it extremely difficult for anybody, except those with detailed knowledge, to understand what all those organisations are about and how they fit together. The Euro jargon would also be hilarious if it were not so serious.

I was amazed at some of the speeches that I heard in the assizes that I attended in Rome last week, along with several other people. Even allowing for difficulties in translation, my constituents would be hard pressed to understand exhortations such as:

"We must pool our legitimacies and co-ordinate our competences in order to embrace co-decision and subsidiarity."

Perhaps when 12 try to speak as one it is inevitable that it should become unintelligible to everybody. Perhaps we should say, "Come back Esperanto, all is forgiven." I joke to make a serious point.

Plainly, definitions of all those issues are vital not just to hon. Members but in plain language to the British people before any more firm and binding decisions are taken. Europe is in such a state of flux that it is difficult for anyone clearly to understand all the components and how they can best be put and kept together. Could the framework of Europe be wider and looser in the form of the framework provided by the Council of Europe on which I serve? The Council contains representatives from every European democracy and has already allowed into its organisation the states of eastern and central Europe. Should the framework be narrower and tighter in the form of the framework offered by the Community? That may be good for nations within the organisation, but it is much harder and takes longer to enter, and sometimes creates friction with other nations and blocs.

As the Warsaw pact disappears, perhaps we should pause and ask ourselves whether large blocs of any kind are still such a good idea. I do not intend to enter the complex debate about economic and monetary union and an independent European central bank because time does not permit. However, I find it quite frightening, bearing in mind that all these proposed measures are of such huge proportions and have never been tried before, that so many people who are for or against, and especially those who are in favour, can be so sure of the outcome. No one can be certain, and for that reason we should move forward with great care.

The conference in Rome last week was an organisational pantomime and an object lesson in Euro manipulation. We went there as a national delegation and were immediately put in political groups. We went with a framework for discussion but were told that a framework did not exist and that there would be a free-for-all debate. The draft declaration which was to appear at the end of the conference was being produced as we arrived and the conclusion at the end of the conference was incidental. I greatly disagreed with the final declaration and I was one of the 13 who voted against it.

The one thing that came out clearly and strongly was that the relationship between national Parliaments and the European Parliament must be a partnership, not a power struggle. I see the national Parliaments as the senior partner. For that partnership to work, we need to establish procedures in our national Parliaments that will allow much fuller scrutiny of all Euro legislation before it is enacted and not afterwards. Somehow, we need to fit together like cogs on two interlocking wheels the parliamentary calendar and the decision-making processes of the two partners.

Although such a partnership may not immediately give more power to national Parliaments, it will certainly give them more responsibility and more confidence in what is happening. Only when the correct mechanism to link national Parliaments and the European Parliament is properly devised and in place will we be able to move forward in the right direction and at the right speed. Only then will the true and desirable balance of power and responsibility between all the parties involved become apparent. I urge the Government to undertake this organisational task with the greatest possible urgency.

7.34 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): We all know that Europe is living through a momentous period. The collapse of communism in the east, the unification of the two German states and the Gulf crisis create a new situation. At the same time, technological changes are speeding the globalisation of the economy and the environment. They are also reducing control of Governments over a future which in many ways, although hopeful, is more uncertain than ever.

I shall not use the word "assize" but will speak about the conference of European Parliaments in Rome which I attended last week. At that conference there was a great deal of discussion about what kind of Europe we wanted. Like many hon. Members, I had not spent much time thinking about Europe and discussing it, and at the conference I listened and learned a lot.

It is important for us to decide what kind of Europe we want and how it should be shaped. I want to see a Europe that is committed to reducing social inequality and underdevelopment. That means that it must set high social standards so that everyone benefits from the creation of the single market, which must have effective consumer protection. Such minimum social rights in every European country will prevent companies from competing unfairly through the lowering of employment and social conditions.

European economic developments must respect the environment. It has been said many times, but it is true and it needs to be repeated, that pollution knows no boundaries and does not respect nation states. Europe needs an environmental charter which sets out principles on which we can all co-operate and an environmental policy that will carry us forward into the next century. Europe must support its less prosperous regions. I think that there is a European term for that. At the conference I picked up all sorts of new European terminology. One of the things that came out of the conference was that we

want to get ordinary people in Britain to think about Europe and understand it. We must stop using terms which mean nothing to most people. Many hon. Members use terms without really understanding them. I should like to see them try to explain those terms to their constituents.

Our new Europe must actively co-operate with the emerging democracies and not shut the door of membership to the rest of Europe. It must also continue to develop co-operation and not forget the peoples of the third world. Above all, the Europe that we want must be democratic if it is to exercise such responsibility. It must also be democratically accountable and must promote the involvement of all its citizens in decisions affecting their lives. Central to that is the extension of majority voting on environmental and social issues so as to prevent progressive policies proceeding only at the pace allowed by the most backward. Unfortunately, in the past few years Britain has been backward on many social and environmental issues.

We must also consider how we scrutinise what is happening in Europe. Perhaps in that respect I am as much to blame as any hon. Member. However, most of the time we discuss European directives and legislation late at night. If we are seriously to examine that or any other legislation, we should not do so at such ridiculous hours.

The national Parliaments and the European Parliament should complement each other's work so as to ensure proper democratic scrutiny. There is no need for any new institutions to bring the Parliaments together. We have enough institutions and bureaucracies already. How do we make people feel more European? How do we become more European? As I said at the conference, it does not happen overnight. People do not wake up one morning and say, "I feel European." To be honest, most people in this country do not feel European. We must bring together not just parliamentarians but people, throughout Europe. The success of the European ideal depends on the children and young people of Europe, and we have to find ways to bring them together. More and more, young people are travelling and working abroad, finding that countries have similarities, that they get on with people abroad—and that what is abroad is not just a foreign country.

Here I stress the importance of my interest in the language which transcends all other languages—the language of sport. Here is a simple example of how undemocratic the European Commission is and this is why we need to democratise it. Recently, it offered £6 million —to be divided among the countries of Europe—to bribe their Olympic athletes to wear a European symbol at the Olympic games in Barcelona. If that suggestion had been properly discussed in a democratic body, the money would be going not to elitist sport, but to the grass roots, to school sport and school exchanges. If we think that an Olympic athlete, from whatever country, wearing a European symbol will change the attitude of young people towards Europe, we are wrong. If the money went instead towards enabling children to compete against one another and towards the development of European sporting teams, such as the recent golf team, we should be doing better. We must ensure the free movement of football players in Europe. We should bring together the people of Europe, not just at parliamentary level, because that will change people's attitudes and make them feel European.

We have to make it clear that this Parliament and this country cannot accept the taking away of any more legislative power from our national Parliament unless and until the Community's decision—making procedure is far more democratic. It is wrong that control should be taken out of the hands of national Parliaments just so that Ministers can decide matters in secret meetings far from the public and from criticism by the Opposition.

We cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand and say that if we do nothing Europe will go away and we can go back to how things were 10 years ago. Europe is there for us to be involved in and to work with. We must bring about the kind of Europe that we want for the future of our children and our children's children.

7.43 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) said that Europe is here. Of course it is—it has been here for thousands, if not millions, of years. However, the definition of Europe, and who will run it, is what is at stake in this argument.

After some difficulty, I have just got hold of the statute for the proposed central bank. It was delivered to me late this afternoon, and contains some interesting material. At bottom, it means that the powers of the House will be taken and given to independent, unelected bankers so that they can run our affairs. That is the unvarnished truth, at the heart of which lies a bigger question. In the course of doing that, our democracy, our consent to and the control over the co-operation that we want in Europe will be taken as well.

I acknowledge that the Governor of the Bank of England has put a reserve on the statute, but I hope and trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us that the Government have every intention of vetoing it, because there is no gradual progression down the route of this detailed statute. The issue is not whether we can gradually move down that path—the situation is clear cut against the background of the Ashford castle meeting in Dublin earlier this year and of the Delors committee report, and there is no doubt about where we are being taken—but that we have reached the point of decision.

Therefore, I look to the Government to make the position clear. I have asked on a number of occasions for a White Paper, as I did in the last business questions taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) as Leader of the House. I got pretty short shrift from him, as I have often done in the past when I raised the question of federalism, as long as five years ago. But these are fundamental questions not only about the position of the House but, more importantly, about the position of the ordinary man in the street and his consent to, and involvement in, the democratic government of the country. That is an even wider question, because it involves us as Members of Parliament and the trust that we hold on behalf of the people whom we represent. Therefore, we have no right to go down this path, as it would deny that trust. As Disraeli said, "Trust the people." We must do that in this context.

There is a broader background against which I shall set my remarks. Without any disrespect to the German people, there is an inevitable consequence—I can claim that that will be the case—of the fact that this bank will effectively cut through all the paper. I have some small experience on constitutional matters, and I know that the paperwork will not withstand the realities of power. In 1980-81, before I was elected to the House, I was advising on the Canadian provincial case for the patriation

[Mr. William Cash]

proposals. The other day, I saw Mr. Delors at the assize. I said to him, "Please do not continue to allow us to be taken down this route, because we shall end up with 12 Quebecs."

There are enormous internal tensions within the Community, which will be made worse if the binding rules are imposed with the package of procedures that is laid down. Already there is potential for a civil war in some of the southern Mediterranean countries. When they are faced with the reality of their consensus being taken over by these independent bankers, and the paymasters—Germany and ourselves—resisting the amount of money that will be paid down that route, the problems will become more serious.

As I said to Mr. Delors, all those problems are avoidable now if only we would back off from this ridiculous progression towards what some people would call a historical necessity.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): What did he say?

Mr. Cash: He said that he would see me again on another occasion.

Many questions arise from this draft statute, but there are even more questions for the Government to face. Everybody knows that I have been a completely loyal supporter of the Government since I came to the House. In addition, I have tabled motions, which have gained a great deal of support from Back Benchers, directed at this very question. I have no doubt that there is a similar feeling among Labour Members that we do not want to be sucked into a black hole. We want to make sure that we sustain democracy, not only in this country and our constituencies, but in Europe. As Bismark said, "Those who speak in grand terms about Europe are the ones whose motives I most suspect".

Without any disrespect to Germany, we must help it to understand how the enormous engine of power that it has at its disposal could be misused in the future. Only two nights ago, I had dinner with a most distinguished German journalist. He said, "For heaven's sake, make sure that this doesn't go through." He has written articles about this, and he knows that the reality is that, if Germany were to obtain the degree of control over Europe that would be the consequence of the proposed independent central bank, it would not be in the interests of Germany or Europe, and it would certainly not be in the interests of the United Kingdom.

I shall say no more about the farce of the European conference that I attended, where serious questions were raised about matters of consent. It had no legitimacy. I had hoped that we would have a serious discussion, but it was an opportunity lost—a tragedy.

The other day I had the pleasure and honour to be at Ditchley park, talking to some of the people whose opinions the House would respect. As the conference progressed there was an increasing awareness that the notion of subsidiarity is not on. That is because it begs the central question. Once one has arrived at the point of assuming that the higher tier—of which the independent central bank is to be the highest tier in terms of economic and monetary policy—is to be conceded, there is no need for subsidiarity. It eats itself up like Monty Python.

Subsidiarity would hand over democracy to a "judocracy". It would hand over to the courts intensely political decisions, and they do not want that. I cannot name some of the people to whom I have spoken on this subject. They are justices whose names I am not prepared to divulge at the moment. They have told me that they do not want subsidiarity incorporated in a treaty, because they could not cope with it. They would be asked political questions, and it is wrong for us to contemplate giving them that power.

Therefore, we must proceed not only with caution but with the confidence that we are talking about democracy in the EC, in the House and in Britain. If we were to depart from our conviction that that is what the House is all about, I for my part would say that we have brought Britain to a sorry state.

7.32 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): We all want the maximum co-operation in Europe, both east and west and, after the GATT negotiations, in countries outside Europe as well. The issue is not whether we are in or out of the EC, still less whether the Queen's head is to be on notes or coins; the real issue is whether we are to have new treaties, which will fundamentally transform our national life, our institutions and our relations with other countries, and on which British people have in no way been consulted. In fact, the opposite is true. The British people were promised precisely, and in specific terms, that that would not happen.

In preparation for the debate I looked up the manifesto issued by the Wilson Government at the time of the referendum in 1975. It said:

"There was a threat to employment in Britain from the movement in the Common Market towards an Economic and Monetary Union. This could have forced us to accept fixed exchange rates for the pound, restricting industrial growth and so putting jobs at risk. This threat has been removed."

It is precisely that threat which we were told had been removed which will be reimposed by the new treaties.

The manifesto went on to say:

"Fact No. 2. No important new policy can be decided in Brussels or anywhere else without the consent of a British Minister answerable to a British Government and British Parliament . . . The Minister representing Britain can veto any proposal for a new law or a new tax if he considers it to be against British interests."

How can a British Minister veto anything if there is majority voting and political union? It seems that the voters were misled, if not lied to at that time.

If the powers of Parliament are to be given away, it is not just a matter for us. The powers of Parliament are the powers of the people, and how are they to be consulted? After all, we are just the temporary custodians of those powers. It is not for us to barter those powers away without consulting those who sent us here.

There are to be two conferences. The first is on political union. What does that mean? Will someone explain that to us? Do we want it? What are the advantages? Would it be durable? The conference will deal with political integration, the division of powers between EC institutions, and the balance of power between the member states and the EC as a whole. Some people are demanding rather noisily that Community competence should be extended to foreign policy, defence policy and security policy. There are voices urging a single federal or unitary state, which would have one seat at the United Nations

and in 100 other international bodies, a single embassy in foreign states and be endowed with single treaty-making powers.

Is there any suggestion that that is what our electors want? I have not had a single letter from any of my constituents saying that that is what they want. One thing is for sure and that is that the more power is centralised, the greater the loss of democratic accountability. There is no democracy anywhere in the EC. It is a no-go area for democracy.

The EC's executive is the Commission. Who elects it? There are no elections to that body at all. All its members are appointed. The legislature is the Council. It meets, works and legislates in secret. Ministers are not held to account in national Parliaments. They hide behind collective decisions, and they will do that more so if there is majority voting.

The European Parliament is elected, but it is not a real Parliament. A real Parliament legislates. The European Parliament does not. Its standing and reputation are poor. Few people show any interest in it, vote for it or know who their European Member of Parliament is. It can never be the focus for people's hopes and aspirations. If an attempt were made to turn it into a real Parliament, to give it more powers, where would those powers come from? They could be taken only from national Parliaments. A real European Parliament would imply a European Government, a centralised European state.

People say that we need not worry about that because we have the lovely principle of subsidiarity—that the centre at Community level should perform only those tasks that cannot be performed more effectively at the national or local level. That is all very well, but who decides what comes under subsidiarity? Hon. Members may have heard Beatrice Webb's explanation for the success of her marriage to Sidney. She said that they came to an agreement that Sidney would deal with important matters such as who declares war on China and she would deal with unimportant matters such as where the children were educated, where to go on family holidays, and that she would decide what is important and what is not.

That is true of subsidiarity. Where is the line to be drawn? There is no mention of subsidiarity in the treaties. It is not justiciable, and even if it were, who wants to give power to that court? It is a completely subjective judgment with no safeguard of any description. I could suggest where we should have subsidiarity. We should all have our own agricultural policy. Why should we have the monstrous common agricultural policy?

The second intergovernmental conference is on economic and monetary union. Let us not beat about the bush. We all know what that is about. The aim is a single currency, is it not? Do we want it? What are its merits? I have not heard anyone explain its merits. What I have heard is people saying that others want it—not everybody, not the Portuguese, the Spanish or the Greeks—but some others. They are determined to go ahead; we must not be left out. That was the intellectual argument of the Gadarene swine. Those who advocate a single currency must do better than that in explaining its merits.

It is commonly agreed that a single currency cannot work without convergence and that the economies of the member states must all perform in a similar way, with the same rates of investment, productivity, growth, interest and inflation. Some have even argued that they should have the same living standards. How is that to be achieved? How will Greece, Portugal, and Spain attain convergence with Germany, and Britain as well, and when? What comes first—convergence or the single currency?

I am indebted to Lord Hesketh for informing me that European inflation ranges from 3 per cent. to 22 per cent.; short-term interest rates from 8·5 per cent. to 19 per cent.; budget balances from a 1 per cent. surplus of gross domestic product to a 17 per cent. deficit; and unemployment from 1 per cent. to 16 per cent. British inflation is more than 300 per cent. higher than that in Germany, where interest rates are 8·5 per cent. by comparison to 14 per cent. in this country.

What are we to do in those circumstances? Some argue that we should take our courage in our hands, take a leap into the dark, and have a sort of big bang into the single currency, and that somehow all the jigsaw pieces will fit. That is an unrealistic and irresponsible attitude.

Others argue that we must take that action for political rather than economic reasons. Monetary union would benefit the stronger economies. However, it would be disastrous for the weaker economies. Where countries have different rates of productivity, inflation and costs, adjustments are usually made by movements in the exchange rates. While separate currencies remain, any problems will manifest themselves as balance of trade deficits or surpluses, which will alert countries to what is happening. If there was only a single currency, that problem would initially be concealed, and the weaker and debtor economies would be progressively converted into depressed areas. Producers, finding their costs too high, would contract and then close their operations. People would be thrown on the dole, and populations, capital and wealth would be sucked away. Britain could become the Northern Ireland of Europe.

Karl Otto Pöhl last week cited an example in what he called a nutshell, and in what I call a laboratory experiment. I refer to the national economy of two countries with different rates of productivity, having a single currency introduced—the deutschmark in the German monetary union—and it led to the collapse of east German industry and mass unemployment——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman has spoken for 10 minutes.

8.2 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): The House will be disappointed that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) was stopped in his tracks as he was just getting into his speech. I acknowledge his strength of feeling about the importance of safeguarding Britain's democratic institutions, but we part company at that point. I was amazed that in his closing remarks the hon. Gentleman could pray in aid Karl Otto Pöhl.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) made an extremely good point about abandoning Euro-jargon. We should all endeavour to use language that our constituents can understand and not confuse the issues. Whatever happens, there should be an enhanced role for the British Parliament in considering European legislation and further economic and monetary union. In the atmosphere of fragile party unity that has broken out, I hope that my comments will be taken seriously by those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who do not share entirely my vision of the future Europe and Britain's part in it.

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

We should devote at least one whole day a week to European legislation, and not deal with it late at night. It must be given the priority and emphasis that it deserves. Also, it is ridiculous that Select Committees, which since 1979 have done such an excellent job of scrutinising and mirroring departmental responsibilities, do not do more every year consistently to scrutinise European legislation. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs—to which I pay tribute, and whose chairman spoke earlier—invites the Foreign Secretary to appear before it in advance of attending Council of Europe meetings of Ministers. That is an excellent step forward, but every Select Committee ought, as part of its remit, to consider legislation emanating from Europe and report to the House, and we should examine that legislation more properly every week.

We should also grasp the nettle, however reluctant some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may be to do so, of establishing closer links with the European Parliament. It is ridiculous that one cannot easily telephone or visit it, or establish close connections there, given its role in legislation which directly affects the constituents whom we represent. Whether or not we agree with the grandiose plans for a new Europe, we should get the existing system, even with its limited remit, on a better footing.

I am a proponent of a single European currency. All our constituents want to be paid in a currency that is worth something, does not change in value from day to day, and does not cost them too much to borrow if they want to finance a house or business. Looking back over the past 10 years, recalling the volatility and gradual devaluation of our currency compared with the economic performance of continental currencies, which have enjoyed greater stability, lower inflation and higher standards of living, it is not hard to understand why my constituents would vote with their pockets. There is very real national self-interest in pursuing a single currency. If we deny ourselves the opportunity to link our currency with the great European economies, we shall be worse off for it. Going it alone is not an option. Much of the sloppy talk—for that is what it is—about retaining our democracy and independence belies the reality of the situation. What sovereignty or independence can there be if one's country is economically dominated by one's neighbour?

We shall not draw together right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the House by promising implementation of the most grandiose visions of Europe, or by shutting the door on what some of us want to achieve in Europe. The way forward is a step by step, modular approach to economic and monetary union. I defy anyone to deny that that is not in our interests. We need to move forward on a step by step basis which is clearly in the interests of our constituents. For example, when we finally became full members of the exchange rate mechanism, there was a 1 per cent. fall in interest rates and mortgages. That was welcomed by all our constituents. If we moved on into the narrower band of the ERM and it brought a further 1 per cent. reduction in my constituents' mortgages, does anyone imagine that they would object? There can be no objection if such developments put money into their pockets, give them freedom of choice, and encourage a greater propensity to save than to spend. If from that we can develop statutes for an independent central bank and provide our currency with stability for the future, that would be another great step forward. The Bank of England already enjoys a high degree of independence, and the proposals for it to play a part within a European central banking mechanism would give it greater strength rather than less autonomy.

If Britain emerged from the intergovernmental conference having either vetoed the reasonable proposals which have already been made, or with a form of twin-track approach to Europe which would put us in a siding rather than in the slow lane, that would not reflect the tide of events or the interests of our constituents. This is the time to take a step forward—I do not agree with the Opposition Member who said that it is a leap in the dark—and take our people with us. One has only to consider what happened on that dramatic day when east and west Germany merged their currencies at a wholly artificial rate of one to one. Was the result turmoil in the international markets? Did the big bang result in massive depreciation of the value of the German people's savings? Nonsense. It did not. The currency remained stable and strong, and has done so ever since, which shows that if one has the political courage and determination, and if one shows a willing people that it is in their financial interests, they will vote with their pockets. Let us do the same by encouraging a more favourable attitude towards the intergovernmental conferences.

8.10 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): If one looks at the Order Paper one will realise that, in theory, we are debating documents in preparation for two intergovernmental conferences this month. We are also supposed to be debating various decisions that have been taken in the Community during the past six months.

In practice, the debate is about something different. We are debating how power is creeping away from this Parliament, and from the people of the United Kingdom, to Europe. That is the real issue before the House this evening. Secondly, we are discussing the European Community and not Europe. Europe is a much larger subject than the European Community. Many hon. Members feel strongly about being Europeans. We identify with historical, political, cultural and religious developments that have taken place throughout the wider Europe over the centuries. It is an insult to some of us that some hon. Members have implied that one is only pro-European if one supports the European Community.

In his opening remarks, the Foreign Secretary confirmed that Government policy towards the European Community remains unchanged—only the style had changed; the content was the same. I am afraid that the Foreign Secretary fudged over several aspects of European Community policy, as did the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). One new fact which emerged this evening was the dramatic news that it is now the official Opposition's policy to support a federal Europe—albeit with reservations. It has been revealed for the first time that the Labour party is now voting for a federal Europe.

One Conservative Member said that there were divisions within various parties in the House about Europe. That does not apply to the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party. We are united, with one voice, in our attitude to Europe and to the European Community. We

are the only party which has resisted this nation's membership of the exchange rate mechanism right to the end.

What have we seen today? Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed before one of the Committees of the House that this nation is now in an economic recession. As business men—be it small, medium or large businesses—we want interest rates to be reduced as a response to that creeping recession. But the Government are no longer free to do so. They are trapped in the trap that they created by joining the exchange rate mechanism. Sterling is in the lower part of the band, and we are getting dangerously near to a situation in which no reduction can be made in our interest rates without breaking through the bottom of the band. That danger besets the Government's economic policy and could help the recession to increase its momentum in the United Kingdom.

The two intergovernmental conferences in Rome are about European monetary and political union. As regards monetary union, we oppose the single currency. Why? Because the creation of a single currency—we are not talking about a common currency—to replace the 12 national currencies will certainly mean that there will be controls on the elected Parliament of this country deciding its own level of public expenditure. There is no sense in electing Labour, Conservative or Unionist Members of Parliament once we have a single currency, because the public borrowing requirement affects the value of the currency whatever the colour of the Government who decide it. Therefore, the Government will have to be instructed by whomever controls the single currency in Europe as to the level of expenditure in the United Kingdom.

Political union raises the question of what kind of Europe we want. Do we want two different Europes? Do we want the Twelve within the European Community becoming more and more closely integrated, transferring more powers to Brussels and becoming more of a federal state? That is what the British Labour party voted for in Rome earlier this month—with reservations. Apparently a fax was sent by the Leader of the Opposition telling Labour Members to vote for a federal Europe as long as there were reservations.

Alternatively, do we want a wider Europe in which, instead of dismissing new democracies in the east as associated states—as the Foreign Secretary said—we shall involve them in a wider Europe, and give them a greater opportunity to advance their economies and democratic institutions? I believe that we should be integrating with the wider Europe, rather than establishing two degrees of Europe—first class within the European Community, with the poorer countries kept outside at a distance and treated as second-class citizens.

The Foreign Secretary referred to security and defence. He went out of his way to make it clear that they are now treated as two separate issues within the European Community, as we consider common policies on these matters. He specifically mentioned that considerable progress has been made towards a common security policy, and that only one country was withholding its support—the Republic of Ireland. As I represent Northern Ireland, hon. Members will understand that that comes as no surprise to me. In the final minutes of my speech, I shall mention certain specific matters that pertain to my part of the United Kingdom.

Terrorism is now an issue in various parts of Europe: in the Basque country, Italy, Germany and, because of the IRA, in Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as in the United Kingdom, both in Britain and in Northern Ireland.

We strongly believe in co-operation on security throughout Europe, and we want to see progress on that issue being made throughout the European Community. We already have limited co-operation on security with the Republic of Ireland, brought about by the introduction of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It is interesting that the Republic of Ireland is not prepared to involve itself in a higher level of security co-operation within Europe. I suggest that one of the ways that we could get rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is to suggest to the Republic of Ireland that it should apply European standards of co-operation and security so that there will be no need to operate at a lower level of security than exists within the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Three subjects affect us in the United Kingdom, in our relationship with the Republic of Ireland, which do not refer to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but are the direct responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Transport, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I would like the Government to pursue them further.

The first is the European Court decision that the Dublin Government acted improperly by imposing a 48-hour rule upon persons travelling from the Republic of Ireland to the United Kingdom to make purchases. The court ruled about six months ago that that was illegal. The Dublin Government have completely ignored the ruling of the European Court, and that embargo still applies on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic in the Christmas shopping period.

If there were freedom of movement across our border, as there is elsewhere in Europe, towns on the border such as Londonderry, Enniskillen and Newry would benefit from cross-border trade. The Dublin Government, however, ignore the ruling of the court, and, as far as I can see, our Government have failed to ensure that the Community and the Commission will bring pressure to bear on Dublin to abide by that decision.

The European Community is involved, through regional policy, in the question of road and rail communications between Northern Ireland and the Republic. I asked the Government to try to ensure that Dublin takes up the opportunity to accept £50 million from the Community to modernise the Belfast-Dublin rail link. Finally, I ask them also to ensure that the present unfair competition in the Irish sea between the Republic's shipping fleets and those of Northern Ireland is ended. The Dublin Government must be asked to stop financing the Irish lights for Irish boats when these costs must be borne by boats in Northern Ireland. That is unfair competition.

8.20 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I was somewhat disheartened by some of the earlier speeches. I believe that many of our younger citizens have a much more positive attitude to the European Community than some hon. Members: the generation now growing up in Britain is much more accustomed to travelling abroad, eats a much wider variety of foods from different countries and has a

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

much greater vision of the world outside, thanks to television and other media, which bring the world to their doorsteps and into their living rooms every day.

I do not think that those young people believe, like the Foreign Secretary, that there are "ogres out there"; I think that they believe that Europe has many opportunities to offer, and involves none of the threatening, overweening bureaucracy that hon. Members often describe. They also understand that we already have a European Parliament, which they themselves elect. In my part of the country, we are well accustomed to the appearance of signs on our roads and railways telling us that funding for certain projects has come from the Community.

I think that it is entirely possible for us to separate fiscal and monetary policy, and that European monetary union —which, in my view, is now almost certain—will not necessarily lead us remorselessly to a united states of Europe. I do not know whether our younger people want a united states of Europe yet, but they certainly want peace and security, an end to customs duties, easier mobility between countries and the preservation of not only national but local differences.

At present, the EC has no role in peace and security; yet political union clearly implies the adoption of a common foreign policy, and the need to co-ordinate the defence policies of Community member states. Let me briefly set the matter in its wider context, as this is a sphere in which I feel that major progress is needed.

Before the intergovernmental conferences, we should try to prepare ourselves by placing the European question in a much broader perspective. In 1946, Churchill called for a united states of Europe, but at that stage he wanted to keep Great Britain out of it. It can, I think, be said that at the end of the second world war the small powers of Europe were driven together by the threat of the USSR and the overwhelming strength of the United States economy.

Europe, which had been the birthplace of a civilisation that now dominates the world, was a wrecked and weakened collection of former states that had been destroyed by the second German attempt at European hegemony. The Council of Europe was formed to prevent its fall to communism or, alternatively, its sell-out to American capitalism. France has been acutely aware of the cultural and economic threats that those two alternatives have posed throughout the cold war period; whereas Britain, unconquered this century and with its identity tempered by the crisis of 1940, still looked out, in 1946, into a world in which it still had an empire, a place and a role to play.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) pointed out that the world has changed very much. That is true: the Soviet Union has now collapsed, and the United States—that former economic giant—depends on the Japanese and the Germans for the financing of its deficits. The states of eastern Europe are now free, and are lining up to join the European Community. What, then, is the role and the purpose of the Community in today's world? Perhaps we should go back to the vision of its founders, which is, in every way, as relevant today as it was in those very different circumstances.

In terms of global power, the world is now very much less safe than it was during the cold war. Then, every conflict was regulated, suppressed or [illegible]led by the intervention of two enemies of overwhelming might. With the collapse of one super-power and the relative decline of the other, as measured against medium-sized adversaries, the potential for conflict has been heightened. Into the vacuum created by the change has stepped the clash of regional and religious identities, Islam and the Pacific rim trading nations being prime examples.

In 1951, when the European Coal and Steel Community treaty was signed in Paris, there was little that Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands could do to safeguard world peace through creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that then threatened it; yet that appears as the first commitment in the preamble. Indeed, there was little hope that any of the other aims highlighted in the preamble could be achieved —except in the last, the resolve

"to substitute for age-old rivalries the merging of their essential interest; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the foundations for institutions which will give direction to a destiny henceforward shared".

How much more relevant, however, is that preamble today, 40 years on? Others have spoken today of the reality of a German-dominated Community; surely, though, the greater size of the organisation—as it expands to take in new members from eastern and central Europe —makes that even less likely. If Britain really wants to play its traditional role of preserving the balance of world power, it should take stock of its present position and make its dispositions realistically, according to what it perceives.

Three aspects of international policy are currently uppermost in our minds. First, there is the need for military capability outside the NATO area. Secondly, there is the need for a credible response to changing developments in the Soviet Union, especially now that the high-tech arms race is over. Thirdly, there is the need to resolve matters connected with international trade. In my view, European co-operation offers us the best possible solution to all three.

First, in the treaty of Rome, we have

"Resolved by thus pooling our resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty."

In the long term, we cannot continue to rely on the Americans to keep us safe. The United States today has roughly the same massive array of military obligations across the globe as it had in 1945, but at that time its share of the world gross national product, manufacturing production, military spending and armed forces personnel was very much larger than now.

Meanwhile, in power terms, the European Community has overtaken that so-called super-power. The combined regular army of the four leading members of the Community alone contains more than 1 million men, with 1·7 million in reserve. That is a larger force than the United States army and its reserves. Even at its present strength, once combined, the forces of the Community are very much larger than any other force in the world, except that of the Soviet Union. If the Community spent as much of its GNP as the Americans on its military might—that is, 7 per cent.—it would have the largest force in the world.

The European Community—which through the treaty of Rome and the Single European Act is committed to ever closer political union—has found its real power and effectiveness in defence and foreign policy stymied by the

neutrality of the Irish and the independence of the French. We are now being asked to consider the future of the Austrians within the Community, which will only do more to reinforce the neutral outlook that it might have to adopt.

The European Community's response to events in the Soviet Union leaves much potential unexploited. In simple terms, the disarmament that follows from the damping down of tensions can afford even greater savings to us all if the European Community can agree to standardise its weapons and purchase them in Europe. The French and the Irish may press us on the development of a common European currency, but we can press them for greater unity in foreign policy and military matters.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that we should nudge the Community forward on security issues. In fact, I believe that we should go further than my right hon. Friend is prepared to go. We could and should build up a European pillar of NATO and build ourselves up an independent out-of-area force. Some will undoubtedly say that that will mean a further loss of sovereignty. However, I must draw their attention to the difference between legal, effective and positive sovereignty and point out that we have already lost sovereignty over our military forces through our membership of NATO.

8.30 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I shall not follow the line taken by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), although he made an interesting speech.

This is the last debate before the two intergovernmental conferences and I am surprised that the Foreign Secretary devoted so little of his speech to them. The conferences are vital for the future of our country. On that matter I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), although I did not agree with much else in his speech. We both accept that, whether or not we decide to be part of economic and monetary union or of moves towards greater political union, there is little doubt that what comes out of the conferences will profoundly affect our country. Given the high stakes, it is all the more essential that the United Kingdom plays a constructive and positive role at the conferences.

With the demise of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) as Prime Minister, many of us are looking for changes in the Government's policy on the EEC. One has only to listen to the new Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary when he is not trying to put us to sleep and the Chancellor to notice that the tone has changed. With respect to the Chancellor, his style before the Select Committee was different from the strident, anti-European speech that he made to the Bruges group when he was seeking votes for the right hon. Member for Finchley in the leadership contest—different times, different styles. But if the style has changed, the substance is very much the same. The Government seem determined to push on with the hard ecu plan as an alternative to single currency proposals—the proposals accepted by the other 11 countries.

There has been considerable scepticism, not to say downright rejection, of those proposals by most of the countries, particularly the German authorities. It is true, and it will probably be quoted tonight, that the French Finance Minister said that the hard ecu could be of use. Ministers should note that he is saying that only as part of the second stage, not as an alternative to a single currency. For the Government's strategy at the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union to carry any weight, they will have to accept the objective of a single currency, not as something that will happen overnight, but as a long-term aim to be achieved perhaps at the end of the century. They will have to accept that a single currency is inevitable and that there are strong arguments for it.

The drive towards a single currency draws its roots from the increasing integration of European economies. That point seemed to have been forgotten by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. That is what has changed between 1973 and now. European economies are far closer than they have ever been. A single currency is solidly based on the undoubted success of the exchange rate mechanism in providing greater monetary co-ordination and stabilisation within the Community. Above all, it is backed by 11 countries, including the two most powerful—France and Germany. Some form of economic and monetary union is bound to go ahead with or without Britain.

There are also strong, positive arguments why Britain should be part of economic and monetary union. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has poured scorn on the argument that it would reduce the cost of doing business. He should not underestimate that. More important, it eliminates exchange rate instability and provides a stable environment for economic growth. One may say that that is done by joining the exchange rate mechanism, but it is done much more effectively if there is a single currency. We shall have to turn around the United Kingdom economy and that is far more likely to be achieved in an exchange rate mechanism that becomes gradually tighter and eventually, at the end of the century, in economic and monetary union. It is not as likely to be achieved outside, with our currency subject, as it has been throughout the 1980s, to all the whims of international speculation and currency markets. I am surprised to hear arguments for that sort of freedom from Opposition Members. They used to come from Conservative Members.

There is also an important tactical advantage to be gained if the Government accept a single currency as a long-term objective. It would give the Government the credibility and standing to argue about complementary policies such as regional policies and the ability to use fiscal policy, as I believe that we shall be able to do even within a single currency. It would also give them credibility to argue about the role and accountability of the European central bank. One cannot argue about those details unless one is signed up for the long-term objective. Above all, it would give the Government the standing necessary to argue about timing. We can all agree that, with all the differences in inflation and productivity levels, our economy would need a long period of adjustment before it could converge. If we accept the principle of a single currency, our voice is far more likely to be heard when we talk about its shape and timing. If we do not accept that principle, we shall not be listened to effectively.

In conclusion, I want to remind hon. Members about the history of the argument that we have been having. In my political lifetime Britain has missed a number of boats. The most notable was the original creation of the Common Market. At that time, the leadership of Europe was on offer for Britain, but, because we thought that we were still a world power, we rejected the offer out of hand.

[Mr. Giles Radice]

Both parties can be blamed for that. Yet, a few years later, after the shape of the EEC had been decided to our disadvantage, we had to come along, cap in hand, asking to join. Do not let us forget that. It was the same story over the exchange rate mechanism. Instead of going in at the beginning, we went in 11 years too late, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, and at the wrong rate. It is vital for the country's future that we do not make the same mistake over economic and monetary union. We must be in there from the beginning, helping to shape the course of events.

8.38 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): It is interesting that the earlier tone in the debate seemed to be a solid paean of hatred towards the Community and its institutions, yet the last few speeches have been precisely the opposite. That reflects the balance within the House. There is a great difference of opinion in the country, which cuts across the parties. That is why it is such a dangerous argument for both political parties. It is a deep emotional issue.

Hon. Members who oppose the European Community ask, "Do you want a federal Europe?" Are they saying that we should withdraw from the European Community? Have they thought what the effect of that would be on our industry? Where would our place in the world be? They had their way from 1957 to 1972, and we did not join. We tried to form a counter-bloc in the European Free Trade Area, which did not work. We tried traditional methods, none of which worked. We joined because we had to do so, not because we wanted to. Brute necessity drove us to join, and we have suffered badly from not joining sooner ever since.

Do they believe that one country—the United Kingdom—will be able to impose its will on the other 11 members? The original point of forming the Community was to move away from a Europe where one nation tried to impose its will on other nations. The Community will not accept that. A country can join the Community, but it cannot stop it. We might be able to slow matters or divert them, but a policy of hostility, if we have not learnt the lesson already, will get us nowhere.

For several years there will be a two-speed Europe. If Britain does not want to be on the inner track, it can be on the slower outside track and a member of an associated free trade area.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: My hon. Friend says, "Hear, hear." Few people in this country will buy that argument.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) mentioned—this is one of the wonderful phrases that floats about the Community—a centralised, federalised system. Centralised and federal systems are exact opposites. Federalism is about the spreading of power. A country knows precisely where it is, and what are the powers of each function and level of government.

French politicians argue for a federal system to safeguard the position of France. If the Community follows the course that it has been following, there will be a centralised unitary state, which would not work. A case can be made for federalism, and in many ways we are already in that system. There are reserved areas at supranational level, and demarcation is decided by the European Court of Justice. The Government are considering taking a case to the court because they believe that article 100A is being used too much, and they are right. We are in an embryonic federal system and there is no point in kidding ourselves otherwise.

The House, yet again, has missed the opportunity of setting up a Grand Committee on European Affairs, which would look forward at policy instead of our holding the odd one-day debate such as this. We, the elected Chamber, should follow the example of the House of Lords; we have missed the opportunity, which we shall regret.

I object strongly to the way in which the institutions of the Community have developed. The Commission is top-heavy—17 people is nonsense. I should prefer a more open system of election, even a weighted system run by the Council. Most objectionable is the fact that the Council, as a legislative chamber, meets in secret. It is the only legislative chamber in the western world that does so. That is unacceptable, and it must be changed. I would have expected the Government to be leading that argument.

When we joined the Community, our partners said that they wanted us to join because of our experience in democracy. If we had that experience, we have added nothing to Community institutions except the importation of Question Time into the European Parliament. Apart from that, we have been happy to leave the system to roll along. The system suits national Executives, but it should not suit national Parliaments, or Parliaments of any kind.

Once the single market is in place, we shall have more of a single market than the United States. It will be more integrated and will have more common laws than the United States. The scale of the United States' economy and its single currency has probably been the biggest factor in building that industrial giant. I am not frightened by the prospect of the single market. I foresee it a long way ahead and many arguments along the way.

I believe that it is possible to separate fiscal from monetary sovereignty. Fiscal sovereignty should be retained because a country can thereby keep control of its taxation, but why is monetary sovereignty so vital? Until just after the first world war, everyone was on the gold standard and no Government had control. Are we saying that those Governments were not sovereign? The argument is nonsense. An independent monetary policy can act as a strong fiscal discipline—West German experience reinforces that point.

We get so worried about our dealings with European institutions that we will not let local government deal direct with Brussels. Funds which are desperately needed in Nottingham and which have been allocated by the Community are sitting in the bank, and we cannot lay our hands on them. I am arguing this as a Conservative Member and the council is Labour controlled. The fear is not only control of local government spending but the idea that extra funding direct from Brussels could somehow subvert national sovereignty. That argument is gibberish.

I shall conclude by mentioning two countries, one of which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and which essentially are both third-world countries. The first is the Soviet Union, where we can see the collapse coming rapidly. The problem with the Soviet Government is that, although they can see that the command economy has collapsed, they are not prepared to move to a free-market economy. I am not sure whether pouring in aid will solve the problem. The key argument is

the ownership of land. In the Russian republic, it is proposed to restore private ownership of land. That is the key, because on that a private economy can be built. Without it, little can be done to help the Soviet Union.

The second country is South Africa. Ironically, South Africa and the Soviet Union contain all the raw materials that the world needs, but both are in deep trouble. Sooner or later, the Community will have to consider dropping sanctions. I heard today that it is projected that, next year, the mining industry in South Africa will lay off 10,000 miners in the coal industry and 40,000 in the gold industry. As dependants run at 10 or 12 to one, 500,000 people will have no source of income, because there is no welfare state in Africa. We must reconsider that problem.

I plead with my hon. Friend the Minister to agree that we must seize the initiative in the Community by arguing for the democratic legitimacy of the institutions and for more open government. If one visits——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must call on the hon. Gentleman to terminate his speech.

8.48 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): During the 1975 referendum on the Common Market, I stood on an anti-Common Market platform and made the point that there were no panaceas for this country inside or outside the Common Market. I stand by that today. However, I also believe that an appalling disaster would befall many of thosé we represent if we found ourselves alone outside the other countries of Europe.

Hon. Members from all parties have argued today that we should come out of the Common Market. They have not said that in so many words, but that is what they mean. Yet at this very time, Sweden, Austria, Cyprus and Norway are thinking of coming into the European Community. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said that Europe is very different today from what it was in 1973 when we joined the European Community, and he was right to say so. There is a demand from other countries to join the European Community. The cold war has ended and it may now be possible to expand the Community to include the countries of eastern Europe.

The emphasis in the Community has changed considerably. There is now the prospect of a European Community that can be converted into something rather different. I know that Conservative Members will disagree, but I believe that there is a great opportunity for the development of democratic socialism in the European Community.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Oh yes?

Mr. Wareing: I am glad that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) agrees with me. That confirms my positive approach to the European Community. In future, the economy in Europe will be neither the Stalinist dictatorship economy nor the extreme Thatcherite market economy.

When the Foreign Secretary tells us that the Soviet empire is breaking up, I am worried that many hon. Members, especially Conservative Members such as the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), have not yet discovered that the British empire has broken up. From her speech at Bruges and from her speeches in Parliament in recent weeks, it is clear that the right hon. Lady still harks back to the old imperialist slogans, and that she has forgotten that the world has moved on. She has not caught up with history.

Some hon. Members, including some of my hon. Friends, have told me that we shall lose sovereignty. What did we lose when we signed the Bretton Woods agreements? What did we lose when we signed the treaty of Havana and joined the general agreement on tariffs and trade? Many of our problems now stem from the fact that we cannot reach an agreement at the Uruguay round. We are internationally committed to being a member of GATT. When we joined NATO, we lost sovereignty.

I ask my hon. Friends to consider this. If we remain outside an expanded Europe which contains within it a central bank and a single currency, what sovereignty shall we have? What chance shall we have to save the jobs of those who sent us to the House? How shall I be able to fight for the jobs of people in Liverpool if I have no access to funds? What shall we do if investors refuse to invest in Britain because it is the only country in Europe that does not have the single currency?

The hard ecu does not answer the problem. One of the assets of a single currency is that one cuts out currency speculation. If we had the hard ecu but there were still individual currencies within the system, there would still be speculation of one currency against another. If some countries in Europe accepted the hard ecu, but also said that they would no longer use the deutschmark or the franc, there would be speculation against the British pound. That would occur because of some false idea of sovereignty which has long been extinguished.

There are problems of convergence. Some of my hon. Friends would say that there is a problem because Spain, Portugal and Greece have areas that are even poorer than Merseyside, parts of Wales and Scotland. That is right, but that is the challenge. Our areas will be even poorer if we are not involved with our friends in the European Community. There must be a regional policy in that convergence. Instead of British Foreign Secretaries and Ministers going to Councils in Europe and attempting to show how much muscle they have compared with the rest of the Community, they should fight for a positive regional policy. We might then get somewhere and we should prove —if the new Prime Minister wants to prove it—that we mean business by collaborating with our partners in the European Community.

Sovereignty and the old ideas of imperialism have ended. What sovereignty would there be for Britain outside the European Community when there was a central bank, acting as the Bundesbank acts now, within a powerful economy, and changing the rates of interest? Do hon. Members really believe that Britain could stand against those pressures? Of course it could not. It would be even more difficult then than it is now to stand against the Bundesbank.

There are problems in regional policy and I hope the Government will address themselves to one particular aspect of it—that of additionality. Funds are already made available by the Community for our regions. The problem is that the European Community provides funds for our deprived areas, but those areas do not receive them because they are used as funds to help the national Exchequer. That practice must end. If our people are to feel that they belong to the Community, they must have access to funds and not see them frittered away as

[Mr. Wareing]

subsidies to the national Exchequer which, under this Government, is more concerned with giving tax relief to the very wealthy.

My hon. Friends talk about the absence of democracy in the institutions, but they do not say that we should do something about that by giving the European Parliament more powers, and by ensuring that it has control over the Commission and over the Council. If we are really internationalists—I appeal especially to socialists—we should work for a democratic, socialist Europe. That would mean a European Parliament that had such powers. All right, it means that some of our powers are diminished —so what? We were sent here to fight for the betterment of people's conditions. If that can be done only on an international scale, that is the way in which it must be done in future.

I should like briefly to address two problems that I hope the Minister will examine. Assistance is desperately needed in the Soviet Union. In Berlin, Soviet army men and women are already selling their uniforms. There is already the dribble of a migration problem that will become more and more severe next year when the Supreme Soviet passes a law allowing freedom of mobility for Soviet citizens. The situation is desperate. The problem will not end in Germany; it will find its way here.

I hope that the intergovernmental conference will discuss the problem of Yugoslavia and the possible break-up there. It is a severe problem, and it may create all sorts of problems for Yugoslavia's neighbours and will not simply stop in Austria or Hungary—it may cause severe problems for us as well.

8.58 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), I propose to concentrate my remarks on the negotiations for the common or single currency. I was interested to hear of the evolution of the hon. Gentleman's thoughts on this matter. I share several of his conclusions, although I have come to them by a different process of reasoning.

I should declare that I have an interest in a small business which deals in currencies, although it seems completely belittled by the scope of this discussion.

I welcome the fact that we have joined the exchange rate mechanism and that we did so with a 6 per cent. margin rather than with a 2·25 per cent. margin. On the Rome summit, we would have been better off deciding what was to go into stage 2 before deciding how long it would last. The procedural objection taken by the Government is likely to prove to have been correct.

On the behaviour of the Italian president of the conference and the impression of the discussions which took place at the summit and some of the remarks that have been made concerning the hard ecu proposals, I would say that in terms of political maturity and currency stability the record of this country in the past 300 years bears comparison with that of any other member country concerned. I hope that members will be willing to listen to our views at the coming conferences.

Treasury proposals for a hard ecu have several positive attractions. As a common currency, the hard ecu is likely to be harder than any single currency that can be devised at present. By ensuring that it could never be devalued against other Community countries, its stable anti-inflationary character would be ensured. After the record of the past few years, it is easy to assume that a system based upon the deutschmark would be bound to be stable, but that was certainly not always the case in Germany, and nor is it bound to be in future. Less than 70 years ago, in the early days of the Weimar republic, inflation in Germany was worse than it has ever been in this country. For the future, the reunification of East and West Germany has been agreed on such an extraordinary monetary basis that it is likely to increase the budget deficit of Germany and inflation to a degree that is not easy to foresee at present.

It is also salutary perhaps to remind ourselves that it is less than 10 years since Italy and France had to pay 34 per cent. or 35 per cent. for short money. Therefore, if one is looking for a European common currency, there is considerable attraction in settling upon a currency which cannot be devalued against other Community currencies. If there proves to be an overwhelming demand for a single currency—like many right hon. and hon. Members, I believe that that could be the case—the hard ecu could prove to be a more attractive route to a single currency because it would be based upon choice rather than upon compulsion. Any fear of individual countries concerning matters of sovereignty would be lessened by the circumstance that each country could retain its freedom to issue its existing currency. I hope, therefore, that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will attract much support for his proposals from member Governments attending the intergovernmental conference and from business and industry in this country. I hope that at least some of the ingredients of the proposals will be adopted.

The proposals would be an effective way of moving towards a single currency if several countries were prepared to adopt them and, in effect, to turn over in substance to a hard ecu common currency at a relatively early date. It must be recognised that unless that happened, and unless a substantial part of business and industry in individual member countries operating the system was prepared to turn over to the system, at least for large transactions, the system would be unsuccessful because of the transaction costs. Going into and out of a common currency would be so expensive and so beneficial to the banks that in the end it would be unattractive. The only way that it could succeed would be if there was a substantial measure of support from the countries concerned and from those carrying on a substantial part of their activities.

In approaching the issue of a single currency, we should be careful to avoid sentimentality and euphoria. It is important to avoid the sentimentality of thinking that, because the pound has served us well in the past, it should necessarily be retained for ever. The pound has served us well because it has generally kept its value and been widely acceptable to people and countries throughout the world. The same could be equally true of a common or single currency.

Similarly, I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) that there is a danger of euphoria in thinking that we should immediately accept that a single market must necessarily involve a single currency within a short time, regardless of the great differences between the member countries. We have differences in inflation from 2·5 to 22 per cent., in short-term interest rates from 8 to 18 per cent., and in

public sector accounts from a surplus of 3 per cent. of GDP to a deficit of more than 17 per cent. Faced with those differences, there is nothing which inevitably leads from a single market to a single currency.

I cannot believe that with a common or single currency things would be anything like my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) envisages or as is envisaged by hon. Members who paint bogey pictures of life under a central bank. I do not believe that the European proposals would lead to anything like that. There is no such thing as a truly independent central bank. The Bundesbank was shown not to be entirely independent when faced with the prospect of the reunification of Germany. Faced with reunification, the gentlemen in charge of the Bundesbank had to change their ideas quickly, and even under the system to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford referred, central bankers would still be subject to appointment by national Governments. There would still be national banks acting on behalf of the central bank. There is no great difference in kind between the governor of a central bank which has a relatively independent character and a collection of independent governors appointed by national Governments. There may be a difference, but it is not completely different in character from the position in the United States and western Germany. The landscape would not be completely changed; it would still be recognisable.

The House has already made a number of important decisions, giving the European Community and courts power to regulate European trade. The House took those decisions because it believed that, on balance, they were beneficial to this country. If the House thought that it would benefit the industry, the people and the economy of this country to have a single currency, that decision would not be any different in character from or any more irrevocable than those already taken in relation to the single market and the European Community.

Just as the House ultimately has power to say that if we go into the European Community we can also come out of it, it would have a similar power in relation to a single or common currency. The Bank of England would be there, albeit as an agent of the central bank, and it would not require a great step in legislative terms to put that bank back into its previous position. It would be an immense administrative nightmare, but it would be within the powers of the House and the sovereignty of this country.

I accept that decisions about a single currency are by no means easy, but I detect that, even since our entry into the exchange rate mechanism, there has been noticeably more interest on the part of industry and individuals in this country to the idea of a common or single currency, and that interest will grow. Although such a step would involve difficult decisions, just as decisions taken by the House about the European Community were difficult, it is within the proper discharge of the duties of the House to make such a future decision for the benefit of the people in this country. If it were decided that entry into a single or common currency would benefit the country, that would be a good decision and one which the House would be entitled to make.

I agree that before we can reach such a decision we need a much more careful analysis of the benefits of such a course and exact calculations of the benefit to trade, the savings of transaction costs and advantages to the administration of affairs in this country and the Community. Such a decision could be arrived at only after an objective analysis of the benefits involved.

9.13 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I have only a few minutes, but I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will bear in mind one or two points. The Secretary of State probably thought that he was reassuring some of us when he said that the Government's attitudes were unchanged after the change in Prime Minister, but he should be aware that some of us believe that we were in cloud-cuckoo-land before and that we seem to be in the same position now as a result of the Government's attitude on several matters. I hope that the Government will consider the dangers of going forward towards some new bright vision—we have had plenty of those—without remembering how many of the visions of the past have turned out to be disasters.

There will be a huge impact on jobs and factories in all our constituencies if the GATT talks break down—and if they do break down, the responsibility will lie almost exclusively with the EC's protectionist policies. We have presented the GATT conference with a paper on our 30 per cent. reductions. Even the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), who follows these matters closely, will be aware that the alleged 30 per cent. cut is no cut at all. It represents nothing. Nothing could be more insulting to our friends in GATT than to present a paper which includes no cut in agricultural spending. We claim that half the 30 per cent. cut has already been made and we say that the other 15 per cent. will be made up in additional subsidies. That is insulting and wrong.

Of course I appreciate that it is difficult to resolve this matter, but I appeal to the Government and to hon. Members to be cautious about taking another giant leap which may be well intended without realising that all the leaps of the past have turned out disastrously.

I hope that even my hon. Friends who are bankers will appreciate my second point—that we should not disregard the fact that many of the reform plans brought in to try to sort out grievances have resulted in making matters worse. I mention only expenditure on the common agricultural policy. Only this week we were told that, despite all the assurances about cuts in spending on that policy, it would increase to £23 billion in 1991, and that is almost certain to be an underestimate. In 1974 the policy cost £1·6 billion, so there has been a 1,400 per cent. increase. Since the Conservative Government came to power, there has been a 300 per cent. increase. That cash could be used to provide jobs in Lanarkshire, Southend, Nottingham and Liverpool. How can we possibly justify a policy which becomes continually more expensive?

Thirdly, I hope that the Government will bear in mind the terrible problem created by protectionism in the EC. We kid ourselves if we pretend that it is a free trade organisation. In almost all its activities, from industrial policy to dumping, far from being an open trading organisation, the EC is becoming more and more protectionist.

Fourthly, I hope that the Government will not just say that they are opposed to federalism, because even that would be a step forward in some ways. Under federalism, Parliament deals with some issues and some are dealt with

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

elsewhere; but now, apart from defence, there is no area of policy in which the Commission or the Council of Ministers cannot interfere by majority vote.

Fifthly, it is rather a waste of time to talk about the extension of majority voting—or its diminution—because the issue appears not to be in the Council's control. The Minister will know from the firearms control regulations that we discussed earlier this week and from a host of other such measures—and Mr. Speaker's Counsel has drawn attention to this—that the EC Commission has the power to decree that a directive is the subject of majority voting under article 100A, so there is nothing that we can do about it, however ridiculous the issue, unless we can persuade every member state to object to majority voting on First Reading. We are therefore powerless. We cannot say when majority voting should apply and when it should not. That stems from the Single European Act, which was rushed through this House in an all-night sitting. Meanwhile, the Commission is extending its power almost ceaselessly.

I hope that Ministers, particularly the Foreign Secretary, will bear in mind in the GATT discussions that Britain happens to be almost the largest exporter of goods in the world. We are always saying that the continent is a grand place and rubbishing Britain, and that argument is often used by the Opposition as a reason in favour of going further with the EC. According to the Library's information today, we export $5,700 worth of goods per head of population, compared with the Japanese figure of $3,400, the United States' $2,400, and France's $4,900. The only one of the big countries to exceed us is Germany, which is slightly ahead at $6,800.

If there is disruption of world trade, we shall suffer more than any country on the continent, with the possible exception of Germany. We are creating this problem by putting forward a bogus and meaningless proposal, saying that we are cutting spending on agriculture but at the same time increasing expenditure more and more every year.

My final point is extremely important. As some hon. Members have said, a single currency and central bank control may turn out to be splendid—but it may also be a great disaster. Hon. Members with Liverpool constituencies know about the problems of unemployment. What would they advise British people to do if by chance the transfer of economic and monetary power to a central bank created mass unemployment here? That is no scare story—some of us believe that it might be brought about by a single currency. If that happened, what could our people do? The answer is that they would be powerless, and they could not put out the Government or the Opposition. There is a great democratic issue involved here.

9.20 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): This is an interesting and important debate and it takes place on the eve of the intergovernmental conference that is of major importance to Britain and the whole of Europe. We have heard interesting speeches and a wide range of views. It is invidious to single out speeches, but I should like to mention a few. My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) made refreshing, new speeches. Those of us who have sat through European debates for more years than we deserve welcome my two hon. Friends to them. They had much to say.

Even though it may be embarrassing for him, I should like to single out the interesting and brave speech by the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney). I have no doubt that that compliment will further blight his career. The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) also made an interesting speech and mentioned that he had returned to the Back Benches. I understand from the public prints that he resigned from the Government in order to write books. Look at what that has done for the Foreign Secretary. Perhaps such actitivies will again raise the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South up the greasy pole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) made speeches of some distinction. I agreed with practically everything in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney and I shared the task of challenging the Government over their guillotine on the Single European Act, but we have taken different paths since then. Although we disagree on this issue, we agree on many others.

If there was one issue above all that brought the former Prime Minister to grief it was her attitude to Europe and on how Britain should play its role. She was fatally wrong on a series of issues such as the poll tax, interest rates and education vouchers if we are to judge by the pronouncement of those who abandoned her so quickly one and a half weeks ago. However, it was on Europe that she made her final and fatal mistake and she was judged, dispatched and displaced in two weeks. That was the lady who only eight weeks ago was cheered at the Conservative party conference with a chorus of, "Ten more years". It can all be put down to her attitude to Europe.

Just 15 days before the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) made his memorable speech, he defended the former Prime Minister on the Walden programme. It was an implausible effort, but it was still memorable because at almost the precise moment when the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were at a press conference in Rome belabouring our European partners, the former deputy Prime Minister told Brian Walden:

"We've had occasions like this before. I've attended a number of summit meetings with the Prime Minister in which at this particular stage we have found ourselves expressing a sharply different view—an apparently sharply different view. You may remember that before we achieved the so-called Single European Act, that's the last major treaty between us, we had a summit meeting six months before where we appeared to be completely at odds with most, if not quite all, of our European partners. But at the end of the day, when we came to a Single European Act by hard negotiations we achieved a result which Parliament endorsed quite readily."

Leaving aside the fact that it was the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), that great European, who got the measure through by use of the guillotine, that is what the then Deputy Prime Minister said, although we now know that it was not what he was thinking. Let the House again savour what the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East said, for these words are the ball-bearings on which the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) rolled down into oblivion. He said:

"We must at all costs avoid presenting ourselves yet again with an over-simplified choice, a false antithesis, a bogus dilemma, between one alternative, starkly labelled 'co-operation between independent sovereign states' and a second, equally crudely labelled alternative, 'centralised, federal super-state', as if there were no middle way in between."

He went on, referring specifically to economic and monetary union, to say:

"We must be positively and centrally involved in this debate and not fearfully and negatively detached. The costs of disengagement here could be very serious indeed."

No one who heard that speech or read it will ever forget it. In his peroration he said:

"If we detach ourselves completely, as a party or a nation, from the middle ground of Europe, the effects will be incalculable and very hard ever to correct."

I quote those words not simply to extract the last juices from the convulsions that have swept away the iron lady, nor to dance on the grave of the false unity that only three weeks ago marked the public face of Tory party policy on Europe. I quote them because the House wants to know, and the country needs to know, where the new team, which is nothing more than the old team minus the manager, stands on what the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East rightly called "this desperately serious situation".

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman found that his task as Foreign Secretary and deputy Prime Minister had become

"futile, trying to stretch the meaning of words beyond what was credible, and trying to pretend that there was a common policy when every step forward risked being subverted by some casual comment or impulsive answer",

where stands the Foreign Office today? Is there a new policy or is the same pretence going on?

When the new Prime Minister was Chancellor, he was party to that pretence. Has he now seen the light? The Foreign Secretary was party to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman called a pretence of a common policy, so where does he stand now? The Minister who will reply to the debate, whose role in the downfall and replacement of his erstwhile mistress was significant—the St. Catherine's place plot—must have been party to the pretence. Will he recant and confess to us what the truth is and where Britain's real interest lies?

I ask those questions not lightly or frivolously, even when there is great fun to be had in doing so, but because, in its first week in office, the new team, liberated as it is from the risk of subversion

"by some casual comment or impulsive answer"—*[Official Report,* 13 November 1990; Vol 180, c.463-65.]

still seems mightly confused about where it stands.

Mr. Lord: Will the hon. Gentleman come to the heart of the debate and tell us why he voted for a united Europe last week in Rome?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman sat on the opposite side of the hemicycle of the Italian Parliament last week with his Conservative party delegation to the conference. Out of that delegation, three voted for the declaration that has become a point of controversy.

Mr. Lord: How did the hon. Gentleman vote?

Mr. Robertson: The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), the leader of the delegation, could not find it in himself to vote against it, but he did not vote for it—he deliberately abstained—and three Conservative Members of Parliament voted, along with every Tory Member of the European Parliament, for the declaration. I voted for the declaration and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) did the same. We did so with reservations that we expressed. This was a unique meeting. This was not a resolution of the House of Commons; it was a conference of European parliamentarians, using the rules of the European Parliament and, we voted for the general sentiments of the resolution—whatever the imperfections of the resolution and the procedure—believing that that conference was a chance and an opportunity for parliamentarians——

Mr. Nicholls Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will simply reiterate the question, so he should sit down.

We believe that Britain should have its say in the discussions that are going on and the conference provided a unique opportunity. We made our view and our reservations on the subject known, and that is the end of the story.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I shall not give way. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney talked earlier about the small change of the argument, I thought that he was referring to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), whose speeches we hear time and again, and which add nothing either to this Parliament or to the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

But the confusion in the Government goes deep and I give just one example to add to those given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The new Chancellor of the Exchequer—the previous Chief Secretary, one of those who pretended that there was a common policy—went to the ECOFIN meeting in Monza on Sunday last. He briefed his fellow Finance Ministers and the press. What, therefore, is the new policy of the central issue of this debate?

The Independent on Monday morning said:

"Lamont hopes for a deal on EC monetary union."

But *The Times* said:

"Lamont reaffirms policy on currency."

The Guardian headline said:

"Lamont signals EC deal."

But *The Daily Telegraph* said:

"Lamont stands fast on monetary union."

The *Financial Times* said:

"Shift in tone on monetary union signalled to EC."

We are back again to the confusion described by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East—stretching the meaning of words beyond what is credible.

What did the Chancellor of the Exchequer mean—this is of central importance to what will happen in Rome next week—when last Sunday he said:

"I have every hope that the intergovernmental conference can reach an agreement acceptable to us and to our Community partners and which will keep us moving forward together"?

Mr. Hurd: It is simple.

Mr. Robertson: The Foreign Secretary, who comes from a stable of fiction writing, tells us that it is simple. Of course it is if one is writing fiction, but not if one is living in the real world.

In the same press conference the Chancellor said:

"We do not accept the need for the European central bank."

[Mr. Robertson]

But since the European central bank is the very foundation of the EMU intergovernmental conference, either the Chancellor is stupid in pretending that there is any hope of getting an agreement or—despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton says, no one could be that stupid—it is yet another example of the meaning of words being stretched beyond what is credible.

The policy was no, no, no. Now it is perhaps, perhaps, perhaps, and it will be yes, yes, yes. Plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose, as they say every day in Hamilton. This pantomime of twisted words and convoluted, confused policies would be a joke if the issue before us was not so deeply serious. Europe now faces some of its most important decisions for a generation, which will affect the whole way of life of the people of Britain and of the continent for many years to come. Our debate has highlighted the importance and gravity of the decisions that must be made.

The GATT talks, on which the world's trading relationships are based, and on which thousands of jobs and livelihoods depend, are in crisis—even as we debate. There may be a final climbdown. That will be something else for the fiction writers. The Foreign Secretary wrote an enthralling novel about life in the European Community. He is the only man who could possibly have written a thriller about the European Community. That must have given him the qualification for becoming Foreign Secretary, but obviously it was not enough to become Prime Minister.

In one week's time, two intergovernmental conferences will open, and they will determine not only the economic and monetary framework that will dictate the way in which this and future generations live, but set an ambitious pattern for the political dimension of the future Europe.

Even more serious is the situation to the east of our continent, as the Soviet Union enters an unprecedented winter of discontent. Its people are hungry, its shops are empty, and its ruling party is without authority. Its very integrity as a nation is in question. Its leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, has—in common with only a very few figures in history—changed the whole world for the better, yet he is now being condemned and may even be replaced because he cannot get bread and meat on to the shop shelves.

The Foreign Secretary rightly drew attention to that situation, and to the need for the British people to rise to the challenge of providing food aid to the Soviets. Just as the German people have risen to that challenge, so too should the British people. A country that was once the greatest power in Europe and a nuclear super-power is now in a shambles, and after 70 years of being held behind barriers, its people are about to spill into the wastelands in considerable numbers, and that could easily overwhelm us.

If that were not enough to bring sobriety to us over the next few weeks, the newly democratised states of central and eastern Europe, whose freedom we have celebrated all year, urgently need our help. If their economic experiments are not to die, and if their bright new dawn is not to vanish in an anarchic tide of nationalism, we must extend the assistance which those new nations need, and which help to secure our own stability as well.

That is a tough enough agenda, but it is especially tough for a Government who will not tell us where they stand on the monetary and political union intergovernmental conferences. I refer not just to EMU, which brought the Thatcher statues tumbling down in Tory committee rooms across the land, but to all the other key issues that must be resolved.

Is our future to be left to the bankers? Where do the Government stand on regional transfers? Are they willing to allow unprosperous areas of Europe to be swamped by the market place? What is the Government's view on convergence? Where is their agenda for the political union intergovernmental conference that was promised so long ago? Why are the Government so reluctant to address the essential and central questions of decision-making and accountability in respect of the European Parliament? Why is Britain alone resisting the social charter and so many of the features of European legislation that would be to our advantage?

The Tory party has discarded a leader whose European policies it viewed as a liability and a millstone. It was right, and it did Britain a service by removing the right hon. Member for Finchley. However, she left a bitter legacy. She stoked up the fires of isolationist nationalism on Conservative Benches, and they will not easily be extinguished—least of all by a new Prime Minister who has so long and strongly been identified with the former premier's failed Bruges approach. The Prime Minister will certainly be unable to mend the splits before next week's conference.

There is a new mood in Europe today. Those of us who were privileged enough to attend the conference of the Parliaments in Rome last week can testify that across the Community, from left to right, people are committed to a process of closer integration. We cannot wish that mood away. They do not think that that process challenges their own precious national identities, and neither should we.

Britain can be part of that process—shaping it, influencing it and moulding its outcome. We can choose to stay apart, uncontaminated. The choice is ours. What we cannot do is fool the British people into believing that their lives will not be for ever affected intimately by what others agree on.

I fear that this divided Government, with no clear vision, unprepared for the new mood, and criminally responsible for the fact that our economy is not prepared for what it is about to join, are no Government fit to face Europe's future. It is time that they stepped aside and allowed a Government with commitment to take over.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): This has been a valuable debate and, despite a late start, 18 hon. Members have spoken. I shall do my best, in the course of my remarks, to touch on the points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his opening remarks dealt with aid to the Soviet Union and to eastern Europe. He also touched on the Community's approach to the Gulf, progress on the single market, the European Free Trade Area negotiations and enlargement, as well as defence and security aspects of the future of our continent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), with his well-known persistence, remained to the very end of the debate, and asked a question about the

general agreement on tariffs and trade which I am delighted to be able to answer. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that some progress has been made today on services and intellectual property rights, and that the Council of Ministers authorised the Commission to continue negotiations on agriculture on the basis of a text tabled by the chairman of the negotiating group. Negotiations are again joined, and are likely to continue through the night.

A number of hon. Members referred to the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made a brisk but distinguished speech, and I should like to touch on that and on those made by the hon. Members for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) and for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer).

The right hon. Member for Llanelli made it clear that an imposed single currency would cause massive damage in the weaker regions. He mentioned south Wales and Spain—two areas to which I am especially attached. That is precisely why the Spanish Government have shown interest in our hard ecu proposals, which would move with the grain of the market, and avoid the sort of dislocations to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

The majority of hon. Members have concentrated their remarks on the other IGC conference, and I shall do likewise. There will shortly be a debate on the intergovernmental conference on European monetary union, and although it meets on 15 December, that is a short ceremonial meeting which will deal with organisational matters only, and the conference will not begin its work until January.

The Government's starting and finishing point at these conferences is the House. Those of us who live and work here, Mr. Speaker, would not claim perfection for it. Nevertheless, few would deny that it has a unique ability to express and give voice to the concerns of those we represent.

No EC directive—whether it deals with asparagus, fishing, or standards for lawn mowers—can hope to slip past the beady eyes of the Scrutiny Committee chaired by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). If any constituency or group interest is affected, then the Minister concerned can expect to be bombarded by early-day motions, written and oral questions, speeches and visits. That is not always convenient for the Executive, but we believe that democratic accountability begins at home. No British Government who sought to undermine or diminish the House's ability to carry out its duty on behalf of its Members' constituents could claim to be taken seriously. That point was stressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). It is to the House that we must ultimately answer.

Why do we feel so strongly? The fact is that this country is the only member of the Community whose democratic institutions have not been entirely uprooted at least once in the past 100 years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) pointed out. Consequently, hon. Members on both sides of the House feel pretty attached to them. As I have said, we do not claim perfection for the House or for our institutions, but we feel that they have an intrinsic value, which, with no sense of presumption, we commend to our Community partners.

Our general approach, then, is one of respect for this House and a hope that what is best about it may commend itself to our partners, coupled with a willingness to listen to other ideas, wherever they may come from.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am afraid not. I have very little time, and I should like to touch on speeches made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

That, then, is the spirit in which we shall enter the intergovernmental conference. We believe that the institutional balance within the Community between the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament is broadly right, and our proposals are aimed at building carefully on those institutions. There will, of course, be a lot of high falutin' language flying about—the maximalist proposals in the Commission paper provide a good example. We shall consider proposals on their merits, resisting those that we dislike and pushing those that we want. I remind the House that no treaty amendment can be made without unanimity, and that the final outcome of our discussions will have to be ratified by the House.

I will outline some of the principal proposals that we shall be presenting. The first relates to subsidiarity, which has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Like any other organisation, the Community tends to build a momentum of its own, and seeks to extend its competence ever wider. We want to impose a simple test. The treaty already sets limits on Community competence, but, even where it allows for Community action, that may not be the right way of taking such action. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his opening speech, the first test should be whether it is necessary to act at Community level, or could things be done as well or better at national level? We would like that principle of subsidiarity to be built into the treaty and, of course, we shall also need an effective mechanism—not necessarily the European Court of Justice—to apply that principle.

Mr. Shore: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way. I have very little time, and I want to cover a good deal of ground.

My next point concerns implementation and compliance. Of the 284 single market measures, two thirds have been adopted by the Council, but of the 107 requiring transposition into national law, only 20 have been implemented in all member states. The United Kingdom and Denmark have the best record, with fewer than 20 still to implement; half the member states still have more than 30 to implement, and one has more than 60. That is why we need stronger measures to ensure that Community legislation is implemented.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I will not give way.

We also need to ensure that laws are correctly applied. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his opening remarks, at the end of last year more than 80 judgments against member states by the European Court of Justice were still outstanding. Only one involves the United Kingdom, whereas in one member state no fewer

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

than 37 adverse judgments still have not been implemented. We want to improve compliance throughout the Community, which may well mean enabling the European Court of Justice to enforce its judgments more effectively.

I will deal next with the question of democratic accountability. As the House will know, we have just improved our systems of scrutiny and we now need to see how they work. They may be susceptible to further improvements and some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and my hon. Friends the Members for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles), have made suggestions in that direction.

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I shall not give way. I want to continue.

We believe that all the people in Europe are entitled to have these matters scrutinised at home. I am sure that other national Parliaments think about setting minimum standards of democratic scrutiny even if they do not want to go as far as we do.

That brings me to the question of the involvement of the House and other national Parliaments in the Community's affairs. I have already referred to scrutiny and we would like to see the House play an increasing role inside the Community. Already the Scrutiny Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Newham, South, has met its opposite numbers throughout the Community and there may be ways in which that can be developed and built upon.

Unlike the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who was thrilled, we were disappointed by the parliamentary assembly in Rome last week. We were disappointed that instead of making any practical suggestions for the involvement of national Parliaments in the Community's work, it presented us with a maximalist wish list. The House is interested to know—the hon. Member for Hamilton was not very forthcoming—about the role that Opposition Front Bench Members played at that meeting. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who led the British delegation, that there was a telephone call from Walworth road——

Mr. Robertson: Oh.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Someone else suggested that there may have been a telex. Whatever instructions were issued, whether from the national executive committee or from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the hon. Members for Hamilton and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) signed up to more executive powers for the Commission and co-decisions for the European Parliament and the Council. They signed up for a federalist charter which is not acceptable to the House or to the British people. I can do no better than to read from a press release issued by the hon. Member for Newham, South, who did not vote for the federalist charter. He said that what his hon. Friends signed up to destroys self-government and "gives a diminished degree of democratic accountability at the price of giving assent to the emergence of a new European super state. No party or Government in the United Kingdom has any mandate to give away the rights of its citizens." We agree with the hon. Member for Newham, South. I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Hamilton was not able to give us more of an explanation.

We will not be deterred by that. We shall be making proposals of our own after consultation with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, the hon. Member for Newham, South and others on both sides of the House. We shall be proposing ways in which the House and its Members can become directly involved in the European Community on behalf of their constituents. The role of the European Parliament can be pivotal to scrutiny and control of the Commission, not in passing new laws but in monitoring Community expenditure. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Gorton experienced great difficulty in making a distinction between security and defence. I despair of the right hon. Gentleman understanding even the most simple propositions.

Next year's Community budget will total about £38 billion in commitments. With that sum, we need to improve financial management in the Community, maximise value for money in the use of Community resources, and ensure proper accountability. To that end, at the intergovernmental conference we shall propose an enhancement of the role of the European Parliament in scrutinising the implementation of the budget and the discharge procedure and, in tandem, a streamlining of the organisation of the Court of Auditors to increase its efficiency and to extend the value of its work.

That underlines the Government's wish to play an active and central role in the debate on Europe's future, in contrast with the unprincipled approach of the Opposition —an approach which has consistently damaged the interests of Britain for the past 20 years.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I am not giving way.

I am delighted to see the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) in their places, but I regret that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is not with them.

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat if the Minister does not give way.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Those three hon. Members are generally in their places like the three witches from Macbeth—bubble, bubble toil and trouble.

Mr. Randall: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would like your advice——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows better than that. I do not give advice on a point of order.

Mr. Randall: I should like your ruling. Is it because the Minister is making his maiden speech from the Dispatch Box that he is not prepared to give way? Can you make him——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought that I heard a cry of "Bogus", and I am afraid that it was.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Those three hon. Members represent what I would call Labour party thinking on the matter. The hon. Member for Bradford, South, who represents what we can now confidently call a marginal seat—a Tory gain at the next election—has been consistent in his opposition to the Community, but he has not let that stand in the way of his ambition. He did not hesitate to take the place in Government vacated by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), who resigned over the Community——

Mr. Leighton: No, he did not.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes, he did.

Having lost his seat in 1983, the hon. Member for Bradford, South crawled away to draw a Euro-salary before returning to the House to inflict on us his own special brand of sanctimonious claptrap. His constituency will be a Tory gain at the next election, and we very much hope that it will be "adieu" and not "au revoir" to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Bolsover has at least been consistent——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am not giving way to the hon. Member. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) wants to hear what is being said, he should invite his hon. Friends to listen.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Minister does not give way, the hon. Gentleman should sit down.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Member for Bolsover is a Euro-phoney and a Euro-cynic, and he is led by a Euro-phoney and a Euro-cynic. The House expects the Opposition to answer the questions raised in Rome.

Mr. Allen *rose——*

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 308.

Division No. 29] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Begg, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Cleiland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*

Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Adams, Mrs. Katherine
Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard

Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,
That this House takes note of—
(a) developments in the European Community, in particular in view of the forthcoming European Council in Rome on 14th-15th December, with reference also to the White Paper on Developments in the European Community January-June 1990 (Cm. 1234); and
(b) European Community Document No. 9431/90, the European Commission's opinion on the calling of the Inter-Governmental Conference on Political Union which was issued in accordance with Article 236 of the Treaty.

10.15 pm

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House may recall that the Minister made certain comments about me during the debate and failed to give the usual response. It is out of order for a Minister, either intentionally or casually, to mislead the House. The Minister suggested that I joined the Government to replace my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) who had resigned—in fact, he was dismissed —over the referendum. The House will no doubt be pleased to know that the Minister's claim was entirely false. I joined the Government more than 12 months after that incident, under a different Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: That was not really a point of order, but if it has put the record straight, let us leave it at that.

Mr. Garel-Jones: If anything I said was inaccurate, I naturally withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: I think honour is satisfied.

ARMED FORCES BILL

Ordered,
That Mr. Derek Conway, Mr. Denzil Davies, Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes, Mr. Archie Hamilton, Mr. Roger Knapman, Mr. Ken Maginnis, Mr. Keith Mans, Dr. John Reid, Mr. John P. Smith, Mr. Keith Vaz and Mr. John Wilkinson be members of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill:
Ordered,
That Three be the Quorum of the Committee:
Ordered,
That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records:
Ordered,
That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

PETITIONS

State Pensions

10.17 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I beg leave to present two petitions from my constituency. The first one was raised by Mrs. Hobden and deals with the problem of state pensions. In 1979, the link between state pensions and average earnings was broken by the Government and pensions were linked to the retail prices index, since when the value of state pensions has declined appreciably in true relative terms.

The petition calls on the Government to link state pensions with the best available pensions in Europe at present. Many countries in Europe have far superior pensions to those in this country. People who have worked and contributed to state pensions all their lives deserve far better treatment than they have received under the Government in terms of pensions and social benefits such as free television licences.

The petition reads:

The Humble Petition of residents of Glanford and Scunthorpe sheweth That there is a need to improve State Pensions. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will restore the earnings link between pensions and average earnings ended in 1979 and bring state Pensions into line with the best in Europe.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Antarctica

10.18 pm

Mr. Morley: The second petition was raised by a local Greenpeace group, which has asked me to bring it to the attention of the House. It is signed by more than 2,000 people in the Glanford and Scunthorpe constituency and calls upon the Government to support the concept of a world wilderness park. There has been a recent conference attended by all the countries which are signatories to the Antarctic treaty to discuss the future of Antarctica. The Antarctic Minerals Act 1989 paves the way for commercial exploitation of that last great untouched wilderness.

Many people in this country feel that the Antarctic should be protected for future generations with a world wilderness park, and they call on the Government to support France and Australia, which have consistently campaigned for that objective.

With permission, I shall read the petition:

The Humble Petition of residents of Glanford and Scunthorpe sheweth that there is an urgent need to protect the Antarctic, the last great wilderness left on Earth, from destruction by commercial development. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will support international efforts to declare Antarctica a World Wilderness Park.

To lie upon the Table.

MV Derbyshire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

10.20 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the important subject of the loss of the motor vessel Derbyshire. I am sure that the 44 bereaved families will be as grateful as I am for this opportunity.

This matter has been the subject of numerous parliamentary questions and of an early-day motion tabled by me and signed by more than 100 hon. Members. Sad to say, they were all members of Opposition parties, including Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland—despite the fact that some of the bereaved families are constituents of Conservative Members.

The fact that 102 right hon. and hon. Members signed the early-day motion, however, is a sign of a degree of interest and concern which has been expressed and which continues to be expressed about the way in which the tragedy has been dealt with by this House and by others who have been involved.

In September 1980 the largest ship lost to the United Kingdom registry disappeared with the loss of 44 lives—42 men and two women. The tragedy happened during a typhoon in the China sea which a vessel of this size should have shrugged off with great ease. I speak not as a layman but as a person qualified to make statements of this kind. I went to sea at the age of 15, was caught up by the war and spent all the war years at sea. I had sailed in almost every kind of vessel, from a scow to liners such as the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary, trooping during the war from the United States to the areas of conflict. So I have some understanding of what happens to a vessel caught in that type of typhoon. In the Indian ocean and in the north Atlantic I have experienced such seas in what might be called rust-buckets of ships. Yet they overcame those tremendous seas, continued their voyages and returned to their ports without damage.

The Derbyshire was a modern ship, the length of three football pitches, which suddenly vanished in the China sea. There are clear signs that vessels of similar construction and design have faults which, it has been pointed out, could have been the cause of the sinking of the Derbyshire. When she was sinking she sent no distress messages, although her aerial system was of a particularly reliable type. The lifeboat from the ship was found in the Luzon straits some weeks later and it carried its own broken boat falls, indicating that a sudden and catastrophic failure had occurred.

The last message transmitted from the Derbyshire was on 9 September, but an air and sea search was not started until 15 September. A helicopter pilot sighted oil bubbling to the surface and forming a slick about a mile long. An analysable quantity was recovered four days later and at the Maritime Agency's research centre in Yokohama the sample was found to be identical to the fuel oil known to have been in the bunkers of the Derbyshire. On the strength of that, the ship's owners—Bibby Line—considered the ship to have been lost on 9 September due to the severe weather conditions created by Typhoon Orchid.

The Derbyshire had five sister ships which could have been inspected for clues and there were many men with experience of the Derbyshire and its construction. However, against the norm and despite the massive loss of life, the Government decided against holding a formal inquiry, apparently taking the view that there was nothing unusual in a 169,000 tonne deadweight bulker floundering in a typhoon which far smaller ships in the area at the same time had survived. The noble Lord Trefgarne conceded that that decision would be reconsidered if other evidence came to light. An abundance of evidence has since appeared, but the Government have persistently failed to hold an inquiry into the sinking of the Derbyshire.

There is evidence of a relationship between the Derbyshire's structural faults and those of her sister ships. In March 1982, the sister ship Tyne Bridge left Hamburg in ballast and started to crack in an area just forward of her accommodation superstructure. Most of the crew were airlifted to safety and the vessel returned to the yard of Blohm and Voss in Hamburg. It is important to note that the Italian Classification Society diagnosed the damage to the Tyne Bridge as being caused by the method employed by Swan Hunter to effect construction in the region of frame 65.

The Tyne Bridge was restored to the intentions of the original design which, presumably, had been departed from to facilitate ease of building after problems encountered during construction of the first of the six ships in the series, the Furness Bridge. Perhaps the "as built" plans for five of these massive ships were on board the Derbyshire. At any rate, they have vanished—the original building plans for the vessels have not been sighted and no one knows where they are. The original build of the Kowloon Bridge and the Derbyshire was altered and the original plans have not been brought forward as evidence that such a change had taken place.

Inspection of the Tyne Bridge showed that the hatchside girders, which were also the inboard sides of the upper wing tanks, were carried through the bulkhead at which they had originally terminated. That was to strengthen the vessel which was inspected by the Italian authorities. Secondly, the metal in the affected area was thickened. Thirdly, a superior grade of steel—grade D—was replaced by grade A. Fourthly, to avoid connected members of different sizes setting up stress points, scarfing pieces and gradual integrating reductions were employed.

Those are highly technical words, but in simple terms they mean that having found faults in the vessel the Italian authorities recommended some alterations to make the point at plate 65 safe. Those alterations were carried out. In the opinion of those aware of the situation, they were part of the original plans for the building of this type of vessel.

Lloyd's was present at the time of the diagnosis and treatment and agreed with us. On the strength of what had been revealed by the damage to the Tyne Bridge, it suggested to owners of two sister ships—the Cast Kittywake and the Sir Alexander Glen—that they have the corresponding area of their vessels inspected. As a result, the vessels were given the same strengthening treatment as the Tyne Bridge. Further research showed evidence of damage in the area of frame 65 in all those vessels, even the strongest built and designed—the Furness Bridge. Yet the Government would not accept this as sufficient evidence to precipitate the inquiry which had been denied in 1980.

The Department saw fit to warn off the Liberian Maritime Authority when it sought information on the World Pathfinder, which used to be the Furness Bridge. I am sorry about all the complications, but for some odd reason the companies keep changing the names of these vessels, possibly to make it even more difficult to trace where a vessel is, the origins of its ownership and what voyages it has made.

The Department of Transport report of 1986 mentioned that these ships could fail in the region of frame 65. That report was circulated to interested parties. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) asked a question about this, after which I wrote to the then Secretary of State for Transport asking him why, if the report was circulated to interested parties, that group did not include the most interested parties of all—the families of those who lost their lives on the Derbyshire. It is a scandal that they were not regarded as interested parties. Although we made numerous efforts to get the Secretary of State to circulate that report, the Government would not do so. When a report was finally released, it was different from the original one—and can only be considered to be a whitewash.

This case has aroused strong feelings, not only among the families of the bereaved but in the National Union of Seamen, and the later integrated rail workers and marine workers trade union, which have urged the Government to come clean and open an inquiry so that the evidence from Professor Bishop, a highly respected naval architect, can be considered. His paper was not before the original inquiry, but it shows that it is highly probable that the vessel was structurally defective, and this could have led to its loss.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): The hon. Member has maintained a keen interest in this matter on behalf of those who lost their lives when the MV Derbyshire sank. I am sure that he will agree that, as well as the relatives wanting to know the truth, it is in the interests of the shipbuilding industry internationally to establish through a reopened public inquiry whether the MV Derbyshire was lost as a result of structural failure. There is now sufficient evidence to suggest that that possibility must be faced.

Mr. Loyden: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. One reason why the Government are resisting an inquiry into the loss of the Derbyshire may be that it raises the question of whether this type of vessel is safe. There is a belief that the design of vessels today is based purely on economic factors, or certainly largely influenced by them, and that some of the safety elements in their design are being overlooked for economic and other reasons.

One of the most important aspects of this relates to the Kowloon Bridge, another sister ship of the Derbyshire, about which Tyne Tees television made a programme. The Kowloon Bridge went aground on the west coast of Ireland, eventually sank, and underwater photography has shown that she split all the way round frame 65. Again, all concerned—including, I am sorry to say, the Irish authorities—have resisted pressure to release information brought to light by the survey of that vessel.

There is undoubtedly grave suspicion among the families, within the union and also among the public. A petition launched recently by the unions about the sinking of the Derbyshire has already attracted more than 20,000 signatures. It is not confined to one area of the United Kingdom—families from all over the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, lost loved ones in that tragic event in 1980.

I hope that the Minister has not come here today with a civil service brief which will prevent him giving thought to my comments and those of others on this issue. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has made representations in the past and no doubt will do so again in the future, and he has given an undertaking that a future Labour Government will have an inquiry into the sinking of the Derbyshire. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will take into account the 10 years of pain suffered by the 44 families of those who died in the Derbyshire. I hope that he will also consider the complicated technical arguments which have raged backwards and forwards, but they in no way overshadow the human interest of the 44 families who continue to suffer the pain and anguish of having lost their loved ones. I attended a memorial service in Liverpool recently, and those families are still banded together. Almost all of them were at the service in St. Nicholas's church, known as the sailors' church, at the pierhead in Liverpool. Those families, every waking hour of their lives, suffer as a consequence of that tragic day in 1980.

I hope that the Minister will not disregard that aspect, and I hope that he will give an assurance that every possible consideration will be given to what the Royal Institution of Naval Architects has said—and, more importantly, to the evidence of Derek Ramwell, a sea captain, and Mr. Ridyard, who worked on vessels in Swan Hunter's, and to all those others who have knowledge of the vessel and what preceded its loss—and thus come to the conclusion that an inquiry would be in everyone's interests.

10.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I have only 10 minutes in which to reply to the very important Adjournment debate initiated by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), and to speak about a tragic event which, although it occurred more than 10 years ago, is still uppermost in the minds of the victims' dependants, who, I appreciate and respect, still feel deeply and sincerely about the incident.

It might be helpful to the House if I gave a brief history of the issue. The oil/bulk/ore carrier MV Derbyshire set sail on 11 July 1980, from the port of Sept-Iles, Canada with a cargo of iron ore concentrates, bound for Japan. The last radio message from the Derbyshire was received on 9 September 1980. The ship tragically never arrived at her destination, and was presumed lost at sea with all 42 crew and two wives.

No material evidence as to the cause of the loss came to light at the time, and it was thought then that a formal investigation under the Merchant Shipping Acts would serve no useful purpose. However, the Department commissioned extensive research into the ship's structural design and investigated reports of defects in sister ships.

In 1986, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, a sister ship of the Derbyshire, the Kowloon Bridge, ran aground on rocks near Baltimore, Republic of Ireland. In December that year, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) announced to the House that a formal investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire would be held.

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

The formal investigation was held under the chairmanship of a wreck commissioner, Gerald Darling QC. He was assisted by three technical assessors—eminent experts in the nautical and naval architecture fields. The inquiry began on 5 October 1987, and concluded on 10 March 1988. It was one of the longest shipping inquiries in modern times. Besides the Secretary of State and the Department, the other parties represented at the inquiry were the ship's owners, the builders, the Classification Society, and the dependants of those lost in the tragedy.

The inquiry was independent, wide-ranging, and thorough. The report of the formal investigation was released in January 1989. The court concluded that the Derbyshire was properly designed and properly built and that materials of approved standards were used in her building. The inquiry considered a number of possible causes of the loss. They included, principally, failure at frame 65—I will not attempt to deal with the technicalities—failure due to fatigue, torsional failure, brittle fracture, structural failure of hatch coverings, flooding, cargo liquefaction, loss of propulsion, explosion, and/or loss of steering.

The court's main conclusion was:

"The MV Derbyshire was probably overwhelmed by the forces of nature in Typhoon Orchid, possibly after getting beam-on to wind and sea, off Okinawa in darkness on the night 9th/10th September 1980, with the loss of 44 lives."

The report made three principal recommendations, and with the leave of the House I will set out the present position concerning follow-up action taken by the Department.

The first recommendation stated that consideration should be given to ensuring a more immediate starting of marine searches when they are properly requested, wherever they occur. I can tell the House that that recommendation was examined carefully by Her Majesty's Coastguard. It considered that present arrangements in the United Kingdom are adequate, and also took the view that the International Maritime Organisation's search and rescue manual contained arrangements that adequately covered incidents involving overdue vessels.

The second recommendation stated that consideration should be given to revision of the guidance to mariners for avoiding tropical revolving storms. I can tell the House that, of the two publications referred to in the report of court—"Meteorology for Mariners", and the "Mariners Handbook"—the latter now incorporates revised advice on the avoidance of revolving tropical storms.

The third recommendation relates to the investigation of water drainage from ore cargoes. I can tell the House that research in this area is currently under way. An initial series of tests has already been conducted, on the Department's behalf, to assess the drainage and strength of a typical iron ore concentrate. A sample of concentrate has been distributed among the laboratories participating in the research. In addition to examining the concentrate's stability, the research should identify those tests which are best suited to predicting cargo behaviour, and lead to practical recommendations being made on methods whereby the risk of cargo shift can be reduced. I should add that further research is currently under active consideration.

The hon. Gentleman referred to new material. The loss of the Derbyshire has never been, and will probably never be, far from the public eye, partly due to the huge size of the vessel, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out.

The apparent new material relating to the loss of the Derbyshire came to light earlier this year. When any apparently new and important evidence comes to light after a formal investigation, it is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport to consider whether it is important enough to warrant the reopening of the formal investigation. An underwater film of one of the Derbyshire's sister ships, the Kowloon Bridge, and a research paper produced by the late Professor Bishop and his colleagues are currently being examined by the Department of Transport's marine accident investigation branch.

I am sure that the House will want to know the latest position. I am advised that the marine accident investigation branch is hoping to put its report on the apparent new material to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport shortly. He will consider that report and then decide whether or not the apparent new material is important enough to warrant the formal investigation being reopened.

I cannot go any further than that this evening. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we would like to come to a decision as soon as possible, but obviously we must wait for the report from the marine accident investigation branch. We shall give the House a decision.

The hon. Member has been very diligent in the way that he has questioned Ministers about the issue.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Garston mentioned the Bishop Price report and the formal investigation. It is said that the wreck commissioner excluded the earlier Bishop Price report. However, the transcript of the hearing shows that the wreck commissioner did not have a closed mind to the report's introduction. It was open to any party at the inquiry to seek to introduce it, at any stage in the formal investigation, if they considered that it might assist their case.

That is an important point, and it is in the records. It was a formal inquiry, and we have to rely on that, rather than reports that were made previously. But earlier reports were readily available.

Mr. Loyden: I cannot understand why the Government, if they are certain of their ground, do not allow that decision to be challenged by an inquiry. That is all we are asking. We are not talking about the conclusions of the inquiry, but we think that it would be proper for the Government to say, "Yes, we have this evidence", and that they are prepared to put it to be challenged by those who are justified in doing so.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has said. The deliberations of this Adjournment debate will be shown to my right hon. and learned Friend, so that he can bear that in mind.

I thank the hon. Member for Garston and the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) for their contribution to what is undoubtedly an important debate. As the debate has shown, considerable concern remains—I have had letters from hon. Members on both sides of the House—about the circumstances surrounding the loss of the Derbyshire. The marine accident investigation branch is examining two apparent new pieces of material

that have recently come on the scene, but I am not in a position to comment on the outcome of its consideration. Whatever the outcome, the scars of the tragedy that afflict those who lost loved ones will unfortunately remain for ever.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 December 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

EDUCATION PROVISION

Mr. Roger Sims presented a Bill to amend the law in regard to parental preference relating to school admission arrangements made by local education authorities: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 41.]

PETITION

London Ambulance Service

9.34 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg leave to present a petition from more than 380 members of the London ambulance service:

To the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled; The humble petition of personnel of the London ambulance service, sheweth that whereas the people of London were subject to grievous risk arising from a dispute, which in the opinion of your petitioners was beyond their power to prevent in a manner consistent with their public duty, repetition of which they and all citizens of London are determined to avoid: the root causes of that dispute have not yet been addressed and therefore unless and until there is a full and proper public examination of the financing, organisation and operation of the London ambulance service there remains a great and continuing risk to the health and welfare of all Londoners.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will draw these matters to the attention of one of the Committees selected to consider matters of public health, in particular to draw their attention to the undoubted and unchallenged need for a service adequately resourced, equipped and organised to respond to immediate or emergency calls in a manner at least as effective as that hitherto provided and to further note that in the opinion of your petitioners such a service, if it is to be effective, must be closely associated with provision of services for an increasing number of injured, disabled, convalescent or gravely ill persons requiring skilled attention during specialised transport to and from centres of medical treatment.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Political Developments

9.36 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move,

That this House notes the political developments in the United Kingdom since 1979; salutes the right honourable Member for Finchley for the part she has played in these developments; congratulates her upon her leadership of the country as Prime Minister for eleven and a half years and pays tribute to the many fine personal qualities that she brought to the performance of her duties, including, in particular, her integrity, steadfastness and courage; and looks forward to her continued contribution to the political life of this country.

When I entered Parliament in 1983 I scarcely believed that I would be moving a motion such as the one that I am moving today against the background of such circumstances. When my good fortune in the ballot was drawn to my attention, I resolved to speak on this subject in anger and with sadness. Allowing for calm reflection, I am even more pleased that I came to that firm decision so quickly, as I now have the opportunity to put on record something which I hope, in years to come, will serve in some way as a fitting tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher).

At the outset I purposely drafted the motion in terms that both the Labour party and the alliance parties would be able to accept. Whatever they think of my right hon. Friend, to have held the position of Prime Minister for some eleven and a half years—the longest period since Lord Liverpool—is a truly remarkable and daunting achievement, particularly when one considers that in the modern world the pressures of being First Lord of the Treasury are far greater than they were more than a century ago. Indeed, I know well that many Opposition Members admire my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley for the way in which she stuck to her principles throughout her period in office. The Labour party feels that if, during that same period, someone of such firm resolve had emerged from among its number it would not be in the powerless position that it is in today.

I very much hope that the House will agree that the terms of the motion allow hon. Members to participate in a wide-ranging debate so that we can closely examine the political philosophies of the parties who send representatives to the House.

I have never thought of the House as a modest place, yet one has only to read *The House Magazine* to learn how hon. Members reluctantly occupy their present positions. What absolute nonsense! Members of Parliament, by their natures, are pushy and ambitious people, and I include myself in that. The Benches heave with over-ambition, and sometimes it is sad that we cannot clearly recognise our own limitations. In all modesty, I have recognised my own limitations quite clearly.

Political developments since 1979 cannot be explained without examining developments in the Conservative and Labour parties in the years before that historic event. Before doing so, I cannot proceed without commenting in some detail on recent traumatic events. When my party decided that there should be a contest for the leadership, I was horrified and immediately recalled the lines of the song, "That ain't no way to treat a lady." Whatever the collective view of the party, I could not believe that we would embark on a highly public spectacle, with the drama intensified through the television, newspapers and radio.

[Mr. David Amess]

Perhaps I am old fashioned in these matters, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) said, what has happened to chivalry?

The challenge of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley against my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) in 1975 took place in entirely different circumstances. The main difference was that we had lost three general elections and had dramatically changed our policies. I can recall sitting a political paper at college which specifically referred to Conservative party U-turns. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup was the Leader of the Opposition at that time, but the recent leadership contest took place while my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was Prime Minister and after we had won three general elections in a row, which is not a bad record by any standards.

The leadership rules of our party are complete nonsense, and were devised by someone who is not even a member of it. It seems bizarre that a candidate can lose with 204 votes but win with 185. I readily admit that in both ballots I voted for the person who obtained the highest number of votes. I very much hope that my party will take a strong grip on our internal organisation to ensure that the present system is scrapped and that Prime Ministers can no longer be challenged. I make no criticism whatsoever of the personal position of any of the challengers; it is the system that I blame. It is one of the further, more extraordinary conclusions that can be drawn from the years when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley led our party that she fundamentally influenced the changes in the leadership of the Labour party and yet ultimately sacrificed herself to change the leadership rules of our own party.

Much as I regret recent events, I shall always regard it as a privilege and an honour to have served in two consecutive Parliaments with my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley as leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister. It was because of her that I won my seat in 1983, and since that time Basildon has enjoyed increasing prosperity and improvements in lifestyle.

I wish that I had, even in some small measure, the integrity, steadfastness and courage that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley has always displayed. At the age of 11, I decided that I wanted to be a Member of Parliament. That was the ambition of a boy living in the constituency of Newham, North-West, which returned the first ever Labour Member of Parliament—Keir Hardie. I did not form that ambition because of parental influence or anything that I read. I had a wonderful home life and went to an excellent school, which, as was quite common at the time, had 50 children in the classroom. My word, how times have changed as a result of the Government's excellent education polices.

I decided at an early age that what was around my local environment was, to put it crudely, rotten, and I looked to blame those who were responsible for running the town's affairs—the Labour party. Everything in Newham was Labour—even the pillar boxes were red. I determined to oppose those in power on the simple premise that, in my short lifetime, I had seen a deterioration in my local environment.

The modernisation of the Conservative party goes back to when the noble Lord Home was Prime Minister. I have always held him in the highest esteem. He behaved most honourably when he was removed as leader of our party. A steady change in the Conservative party took place at the precise time that I became interested in politics. When it is asked, "Which party is interested in a classless society?", as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently asked, the answer is quite clear—the Conservative party. We elected a grammar school boy as our leader. He was preceded by the daughter of a grocer, who was preceded by the son of a builder.

Perhaps it should not be such a surprise that someone with as humble a background as myself should have become a Conservative Member of Parliament rather than a Labour Member of Parliament. There I was, living in a tiny terraced house with an outside toilet and tin bath. My father was an electrician and my mother a dressmaker and tea lady—not quite the pedigree of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with his vaudeville background. There is no doubt in my mind that the election of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with actions speaking louder than words, is clear proof that class is no barrier to achievement in the Conservative party.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Tell us about the rest of the Cabinet.

Mr. Amess: I will come to that later.

I have no doubt that Labour is wholly associated—and even obsessed—with class; one has only to listen to some union leaders to realise that. The Labour party believes that the working classes have to be kept in their places. As a Newham boy, I was having none of that.

I want to turn to the development of conservatism and of socialism up to the historic moment when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley entered Downing street for the first time on 4 May 1979. The defeat of Winston Churchill in the general election after the war will always serve as a salutary lesson, especially in the light of present events. It showed that gratitude can never, and should never, be taken for granted.

The Labour Government introduced massive nationalisation, and state controls and restrictions, thus behaving in a perfectly honourable fashion following their deeply held belief in socialism and in the power of the state. The Labour Government was followed by 13 years of Conservative Government from 1951. Our party pursued our equally deeply held views on the powers of the individual. During that period, a 50 per cent. increase in the standard of living was achieved—a greater increase than had been achieved in the previous half century. Prices were stable, income tax was cut four times, and almost 5 million new homes were built. The economic growth allowed for record improvements in education, in health, in pensions and in other benefits.

Towards the end of that period, Hugh Gaitskell made what will always stand as a courageous attempt to retain pure socialist principles within the Labour party's alternative policy programme. He lost, although his "fight, fight and fight again" speech still strikes a chord with many people today.

The noble Lord Wilson, who formed his first Government in 1954, was the dominant political figure during my early years. History will judge him to be a masterful political operator, although his leadership of the

Labour party meant that socialism untimately lost its relevance and its way. My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley may remember a quotation from a Conservative party conference lecture that she gave in 1968. She said:

"What we need now is a far greater degree of personal responsibility and decision, far more independence from the Government and a comparative reduction in the role of Government."

She was far-sighted enough then to recognise the shortcomings of Lord Wilson's Labour Government.

From 1964, the annual rise in living standards, an accustomed and expected feature of the post-war period, slowed almost to a standstill. I make no apology for drawing the attention of the House to how Labour behaved when it was in office.

Mr. Grocott: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am reluctant to intervene because I am quite enjoying this individualistic interpretation of history. However, I must point out that the motion could not be broader as it refers to "political developments since 1979". I should have been delighted if the motion had dealt with developments since 1964, but it does not. May we please stick to 1979?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I am sure that the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) is simply warming up in his speech.

Mr. Amess: I thank you for that encouragement, Madam Deputy Speaker. I knew that I had struck a chord when I drew the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) to the Dispatch Box.

Between 1964 and 1968, the rise in the standard of living averaged no more than 0·5 per cent. a year. In 1966 and in 1967, real living standards fell on average for the first time in living memory. Over the whole six years of the Labour Government, real disposable income had increased on average by scarcely more than 1 per cent. a year compared with 2·8 per cent. in the 1950s. Increased taxation had bitten into real incomes. Under Lord Wilson, taxes had risen at twice the rate of average earnings, yet little, if any redistribution to help the less-well-off had been achieved. So much for Labour promises then.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Does my hon. Friend recall, as I do, a television broadcast made by the noble Lord Wilson in 1967, at the time that the pound was devalued? Lord Wilson said that the pound in people's pockets would not be devalued. Will my hon. Friend reflect on the honesty of that Government? On the one hand, they claimed that they were protecting the pound in the citizen's pocket while, on the other, they were destroying the economy and the wealth of the nation.

Mr. Amess: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. It was from that point that socialism could withstand little examination by the general public. That is why, during the 1979 election campaign, we were right to demonstrate, by using shopping baskets, how people could not buy as much food for their money as a result of the Labour Government's management of the economy. With the growing strength of the unions, a once great nation began to move down the path of decline until the country was transformed under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley.

That path was interrupted by a Conservative Government led by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup between 1970 and 1974. He came to office pledging to change the course of the history of this nation, and he certainly achieved that. He inspired my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley to embark on her radical programme, which transformed the fortunes of this nation in 1979.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) said recently that our membership of the European Community had been coloured by our not having been one of the founding members. That is obviously true when we judge the attitudes adopted towards my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley by other European leaders. Some commentators have argued that our eventual entry into the European Community was embarked on under largely unfavourable terms for this country. There has been a difficult battle since then to retain British interests within the market.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup had the positive intention to set the economy free and to bring the unions within a democratic framework of law. The Industrial Relations Act 1971 proved unworkable and the point was reached when it became politically impossible for the unions to enter any form of effective agreement on pay with the Conservative Government. By 1973, the trade unions and the Labour party had become similar to Siamese twins.

An extraordinary decision was then taken to hold a quite unnecessary general election in which people were asked to decide whether the Government or the trade unions should run the country. If one asks a silly question, one must expect a silly answer. Political chaos resulted and the Liberal party was even offered a share of government. As Conservative Members have always known, the Liberals are socialists and would work only with the Labour party and with a Labour Government. The record of the Liberal party's action over the past two decades makes that clear.

The public had watched on their television screens trade union leaders going in and out of Downing street. It was at that point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was inspired to embark on her historic journey. The House will not need reminding of the sordid affair that the Labour party had with the Liberal party between 1974 and 1979, when they shared government. It was the most disastrous time in the history of the nation.

As a result of Lord Wilson's equivocation, the left took over the Labour party completely. We all suffered and were made to pay as a result of the party's small-minded determination to get even in what is described as the class war. The strength of the left very nearly enabled the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) to become Prime Minister. It certainly helped to prevent Shirley Williams from becoming deputy leader of the Labour party.

In government, Labour continued to pursue ineffective and profligate policies. In the first years of the so-called social contract, inflation soared to 27 per cent. and the miners were bought off with a pay increase of 22 per cent. By June 1979, earnings had increased by an average of 26·6 per cent. and weekly wage rates by a staggering 33 per cent.

In exchange for their restored legal immunities and for food subsidies and price and rent controls contained in the first Budget introduced by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), as well as the "howls of anguish" that the right hon. Gentleman promised to

[Mr. Amess]

extract from the rich, the unions delivered nothing. Living standards continued to fall throughout the mid and late 1970s. In December 1973, the real weekly take-home pay of a married couple with two children averaged £70·20 per week. By 1977 it had fallen to £63·10 a week. What a shameful record from the party that has the cheek to lecture us about living standards.

In the late 1970s, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East had to go cap in hand to the IMF asking it to bail us out. Now, lower taxes and ever-increasing expenditure on public services ensure that Britain has a level of growth and prosperity second to none. Ten years on, the Labour party has become the party of decline, the party of the trade unions, the party of the council estates, the party of the industrial heartlands of south Wales, Scotland and the north. In 1979, trade unionists represented 30 per cent. of the electorate; in 1987, they represented only 22 per cent.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): My hon. Friend is listing the failings of the Labour party. He is in danger of omitting inflation. Is my hon. Friend aware that, in 1987, the Labour party was selling a wonderful glossy colour brochure for 75p? The other day, however, it was peddling a slimmer volume, with no full colour pictures, at £1·50. Does not that prove that Labour is still the party of inflation?

Mr. Amess: I intend to leave no stone unturned, and I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall be coming to that.

In 1979, 35 per cent. of all households were housed in council houses. I am delighted to be able to tell the House that the figure has now shrunk to 27 per cent. The conservatism of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley has appealed to all classes in Britain in a way that class-conscious socialism never can. In 1976, my right hon. Friend said:

"It is the Conservatives and not the Socialists who represent the true interests and hopes and aspirations of working people."

Since 1979, the hallmark of the Conservatives has been our ability to give freedom back to individuals and to give them greater choice and responsibility in the management of their lives.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): My hon. Friend is perhaps not being entirely fair to the Labour party. Does not he agree that it was not unreasonable of the Labour party to oppose the sale of council houses given that, in some inner-London areas, it has lived for years on bribing people with offers of houses or flats to get their votes? It is bound not to want to sell them.

Mr. Amess: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's strictures. He knows very well from his time at the GLC of the bribery of which the Labour party is capable in housing management. We certainly still suffer from that in Basildon, but we are dealing with it through a programme of housing association involvement.

In education, the Conservative party has given people greater choice in deciding how their children should be taught. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is absolutely delighted that a school in my constituency of Basildon has become the first grant-maintained school in Essex—thanks, in no small measure, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley.

The number of home owners continues to increase under this Government. I am proud and delighted that the first rents-into-mortgages scheme in England has been introduced in my constituency of Basildon—greatly encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): How many applications have there been?

Mr. Amess: I am delighted to tell the House that, although Labour rubbished the scheme, hoping for a similar response to that in Scotland, we have had in just three weeks more than 1,000 genuine inquiries about our rents-into-mortgages scheme. That is a success by any standards. We shall continue to encourage and help those people to fulfil their dreams of a lifetime and own their own homes.

In the health service, details have been announced this week of 56 self-governing hospitals. I understand that Basildon and Thurrock health authority is to have its programme looked at carefully in the next 18 months.

It is not just at home that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley proved herself such an outstanding leader. Her contributions in defence and foreign affairs have meant that Britain is truly respected as one of the great powers in the world today. The nations of eastern Europe have been inspired to shake off the burdens of socialism and take charge of their own destiny. There can be no doubt that the inspiration given to those countries by my right hon. Friend was instrumental in precipitating the events of the past year. Who could have imagined, eleven and a half years ago, the changes that have come about in Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and even the Soviet Union?

What can the Labour party teach us about freedom and choice? Not a great deal, judging by its record. In the past 10 years, Labour Members have voted against every Budget that has reduced income tax and every privatisation measure that has helped to spread share ownership. They voted against the right to buy, which allowed council tenants to purchase their homes. They have regularly voted against the renewal of the prevention of terrorism legislation, which has been essential in curbing the threat posed by the IRA. Make no mistake about it: Labour would reverse all the positive achievements of the past 11 years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: At last my hon. Friend is being fair to the Labour party, which has at least been consistent. It has supported every damaging strike in this country since 1979.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend is right to draw my attention to that. I am delighted to announce that this year the number of days lost as a result of industrial action has been the lowest ever. If there were ever a Labour Government—God forbid—they would benefit initially from the achievements inspired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Does my hon. Friend recall the power that trade union leaders possessed under the last Labour Government? Whenever there was a crisis, who should appear on television but Hugh Scanlon or that man Jones; or the one from Wales, Clive Jenkins, who no doubt has been living in the lap of luxury in the Antipodes. They were running the country then.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend is right. In fact, it went further than that. Those people were eventually brought into the Government. That is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup held an election in 1974, but he asked the nation a most inappropriate question.

The Labour party may dress up its intentions in moderate language and talk about social ownership or public interest companies, but that really means renationalisation. Take away the red rose and we are left with the left flag of full blooded socialism. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) predicted that, if the Labour party won the next general election, in the ensuing economic crisis the party, led by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), would move firmly to the left.

There may be certain moderate Members among those who sit on the Opposition Benches, but surveys at the grass roots clearly show that 92 per cent. of Labour party members want higher taxes. Therefore, our spokesmen should continue to come to the Dispatch Box and tell the nation that it can expect higher taxes. They should not be afraid to do that; they should be proud to do it.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I have been listening quietly and respectfully for long enough to get the drift of the hon. Gentleman's speech. Is he not aware that all the recent opinion polls show that if people are given a choice between the possibility of higher taxes and greater spending in areas of social need they are prepared to accept higher taxes? The Labour party is not saying that; the population as a whole is saying it.

Mr. Amess: I entirely respect the hon. Gentleman's position. He has always been honest in the House about where he stands on these issues. However, I genuinely take no notice of opinion polls.

Mr. Carrington: Given what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, perhaps I can help my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). When the question was put in a slightly different way in the opinion polls and people were asked whether they thought that they were paying too much tax, the answer was always "yes". My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon is absolutely right not to pay attention to the polls. They are contradictory.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we were to follow opinion polls, persumably all Labour Members would, on Monday week, troop through the Division Lobby and vote with me for the restoration of capital punishment. That is what the opinion polls state. Similarly, if we follow opinion polls, Labour Members should also have followed me in the Lobby when we voted on abortion and embryo research. However, politics does not work like that.

I represent a constituency which in some senses could be described as marginal. However, I was not running scared when I read the opinion polls in respect of what has happened in recent weeks. I was all for fighting it out and continuing on with our Conservative policies. I was not the least bit worried about opinion polls. I will explain later why I think that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is wrong, and we will judge at the general election who was right.

Seventy three per cent. of Opposition Members support secondary picketing and 68 per cent. of them support unilateral nuclear disarmament. The right hon. Member for Islwyn still owns a CND badge and he is proud of it, but that sentiment is not reflected in the opinion polls.

There is a view that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley led us to three general election victories because the Opposition were split. That view is facile. She carried the ground from Labour. She talked to the blue collar workers in terms that they understood. People who were fed up with hard socialism wanted something a little short of that, but they were disappointed.

Mr. Tony Banks: I accept that the hon. Gentleman may have covered this point earlier when regrettably I was not in the Chamber, but, in the circumstances he has just described, if the right hon. Lady is such a paragon of virtue and a great achiever, why did the Conservative party dump her?

Mr. Amess: I am afraid that I may tax the patience of Madam Deputy Speaker if I answer the hon. Gentleman because I spent about 10 minutes on that. However, I will pass a copy of my speech to the hon. Gentleman——

Madam Deputy Speaker: It would be tedious repetition.

Mr. Amess: The public were served up with a brilliant maverick in the form of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) when the alliance was established. However, that was followed by sheer opportunism in the marriage and sordid divorce between the right hon. Member for Devonport and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). They entered the 1987 general election proclaiming that it was time for a change and they heralded a new style in politics. However, when the Conservatives were returned with a majority of 101, the so-called alliance party let the British people down. That party should be ashamed of itself, and we Conservatives will never let it forget what happened.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): The hon. Gentleman does not understand what happened. We went into that election as two parties and as an alliance. We promised that we would merge and we did so. it was entirely up to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) to go off on his own. However, the two parties merged into one solid Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Amess: I understand the hon. Lady's position, and of course she would say that. My recollection of events is very different. We all saw on television the closeness between the then two leaders of the alliance, but they fell out publicly the day after the election. They presented a dishonest sham to the British public. They were after short-term popularity to try to collect up the middle ground, but they showed themselves to be dishonest. We will never let the British public forget what you did, whether you call yourself the Liberal party or——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I certainly do not call myself the Liberal party.

Mr. Amess: I apologise for drawing you into these matters, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I should move on because I am getting over-excited. The public divorce took place as one of the party leaders stabbed the other in the back.

[Mr. Amess]

Whatever people say, they want to vote into office a Government of principle. The Conservative party has been successful in clearly articulating our policies and objectives. That has been re-emphasised under the leadership of the new Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). Others just blow in the wind. One cannot possibly build a party on shifting sand. The Labour party today is a disgrace. It is totally lacking in principles. It always used to be the Liberals who had no policies, but it is now also the Labour party. Whenever Labour Members find a Conservative policy to be popular and successful, they copy it, but they can never bring themselves to be honest and admit what they are actually doing. That is called designer socialism.

Mr. Grocott: While the hon. Gentleman is dealing with the alleged lack of Labour party policy on various issues, will he tell us, because we are unclear about it, the precise Conservative policy on the poll tax?

Mr. Amess: I shall shortly draw my remarks to a conclusion. *[Interruption.]* I can be encouraged to continue. The hon. Member for The Wrekin will be very glad to know that I shall deal with Europe, the management of the economy, and the community charge. I dodge no issues.

As far as the Labour party is concerned, whatever the public want, they can have. What a way to present an alternative Government. Today I do not know what socialism as espoused by the Labour party is. Eastern bloc countries have been honest enough to admit that socialism has been disastrous for the fortune of their nations. They have categorically rejected socialism and everything for which it stands. They want no part whatsoever in what the Labour party stands for, and they take their lead from the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley.

I said that the Labour party has no policies. I now admit that I was wrong, and I stand corrected. It has one policy—and it is very good at it: spending money. Labour Members kid the public that, whatever the issue, they will be able to manage our affairs in such a way that they can spend more money than we are able to spend at the moment. They kid people that they can make their lives better and cure the problems with which we are grappling. They are even dishonest enough to pretend that their spending programme will not mean much higher taxes for the majority of the British people. Nothing has changed in what the Labour party represents.

We judge Labour Members on their record when they were last in office; and they left an appalling legacy in 1979, with which my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley had so successfully to deal. The management of the economy, our role in Europe and the financial relationship between local government and central Government are all matters that the Conservative party is facing up to and dealing with.

Our present economic policies will substantially reduce inflation and allow my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer eventually to reduce interest rates.

In Europe, everything that has happened until now, including the single market, has been in favour of free trade. In future, though, we will be asked to look at a single currency, which would mean one economy and one Government. I am totally opposed to such an eventuality, as are the overwhelming majority of the British public.

Where does the Labour party stand on Europe? Every year it has changed its position according to how it judges opinion polls. Where do the 209 Labour Members of Parliament stand on Europe? Now that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley is no longer to be harangued, Labour Members must now tell us where they stand on Europe.

If one is looking for a silver lining to the cloud of my right hon. Friend's departure, commentators will now have to examine the real issues and not put the matter down to what they perceive as the cussedness of my right hon. Friend. The other 11 European leaders will no longer be able to sit on their hands, and they will also have to stand up and be counted. That will be extremely interesting because of what it will reveal about the true relationship between European leaders.

The Government are clearly determined to resolve the mechanics of local government finance. That is why I am so pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) is responsible for the sensible management of local government finance. Whatever might be said now or in the future, the community charge is a step forward in promoting accountability and the idea of us all making a contribution to the support of local services. That concept is widely accepted. The problem has been the level of charges that has been set and the overspending of local authorities, highlighted by the overspending of socialist-controlled Basildon district council. It is the worst offender in the country. Last year it was 196 per cent. above the standard spending assessment—more than double the performance of any other local authority.

However, the constituency of Basildon, which I represent, is a shining example of the success of the Conservative Government since 1979. It is the most exciting town in the country, with the most wonderful community in which one could wish to live. The town is well placed to meet the competitive challenges that lie ahead of us with the changing face of the world, and of Europe in particular.

On the evening of the resignation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, I walked down Whitehall to No. 10 Downing street and delivered a letter. What immediately struck me was the visible element of society who were celebrating her departure. Outside Downing street were a group of people who, at the very best, could be described as the worst type of political organisation in this country. That was compounded by some European politicians' ungracious remarks that were later shown on television. Then came word that Saddam Hussein was pleased at what had happened.

If, until then, there had been a doubt in some people's minds, the stark reality of what we had done became clear. The world drew its breath at the departure of my right hon. Friend as Prime Minister. Throughout that period she behaved with dignity. That cannot be said of others. That woman had been, throughout the past decade, responsible for restoring the self-confidence of our nation, meeting people's aspirations, and raising people's views of what they could achieve. She emerged, when Britain was seen as a second-rate nation, to become the most formidable politician in the world—someone to whom the world listened, whether it be in partnership with the American

President, or as a catalyst for the end of the cold war with the Soviet Union. For those and many other reasons, I hope that she will continue to contribute to the political life of this country.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley should be seen in the character of the person who succeeded her as Prime Minister. On Tuesday, an historic moment took place when the present Prime Minister and his predecessor were presented to our party. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon said:

"Conservatism will remain a word for economic progress, social mobility and for the individual dignity that is the natural right of every citizen."

That message was made possible and believable thanks to the leadership of the country that was given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley as Prime Minister for eleven and a half years.

The final tribute that anyone could pay my right hon. Friend now is to unite behind our new Prime Minister and to make certain that her magnificent legacy is not destroyed by any socialist entering No. 10 Downing street at the next general election.

10.30 am

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I thank the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) for choosing such a wide-ranging subject for his motion this morning. The people in my constituency would think that the hon. Gentleman had been talking about a different country with his descriptions of "social harmony" and "the economic miracle". It might suit Conservative propaganda for the hon. Gentleman to try to convey that message but nobody believes that it is true, and if the hon. Gentleman had any sense, he, too, would recognise the real truth.

I should like to take the opportunity of the motion to debate one change which we have not had in the past decade, but which we need. It is time that we changed the time at which the House of Commons conducts its business. It is time that we moved out of the 17th century and towards the 21st century. It is time that we stopped operating like a gentleman's club and started to operate like a modern, effective legislature. We have a sophisticated industrial economy. We have an advanced parliamentary democracy, yet our Parliament is based back in the times when Members did a bit of farming in the morning, some trading in the City or some work in the law courts, and came into the House in the evening for a spot of dinner and the odd vote. We cannot go on like that. As it is currently structured, the House of Commons is not serving the country and will not be able to serve it well in the future.

Of course, traditions are important and it is important that we remember our history. We are reminded of our history in the pink ribbon that each of us has hanging on our coat hangers to mark where we should hang our swords. We are reminded of our traditions in the costumes worn by the Serjeant at Arms and by Mr. Speaker. There is nothing wrong with traditions and it is important that we remember and learn from our history. However, we must not allow ourselves to be held back by our traditions and some of the traditions in the House are now doing that. We need to change so that we can work more effectively, and one of the changes needs to be in the hours that Parliament sits.

One reason why change is needed is that late sittings deter women from seeking entry to the House of Commons. It is not acceptable that only 6·5 per cent. of Members are women, representing or purporting to represent a country in which half of the population comprises women. This Parliament is profoundly unrepresentative because it is male-dominated. Although the Prime Minister said recently that we fail to recognise the changing role of women in society at our peril, he is quite happy to have a House of Commons that is overwhelmingly male-dominated and to have an all-male Cabinet.

Mr. Wilshire: Before the hon. Lady gets too carried away with feminism being the reason why change is required, may I remind her that there are plenty of men among my hon. Friends—and probably among her hon. Friends also—who see changing the hours not as a feminist cause, but as a cause for common sense for all hon. Members?

Ms. Harman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a growing feeling for change among hon. Members, both young and old, and on the Conservative as well as the Opposition Benches. Many of us have come to the same conclusion but for different reasons. The hon. Gentleman and I agree on the issue, but we come to that agreement for completely different reasons.

It is wrong that we have a Parliament that is so unrepresentative of women in society. As men and women lead different lives, it is not acceptable that only the male view is heard in Parliament and that men should make decisions that affect women's lives.

There are many reasons why women do not come into Parliament. Many find it difficult to be selected by their party for winnable seats. I do not underestimate the problem facing women who seek to become Members of Parliament. There are barriers all along the way and one is the hours that the House sits. I know that many excellent women who I feel could easily be selected for a parliamentary seat and whom we need in the House, but who will not put themselves forward for Parliament because the hours are difficult to reconcile with family life. People should not be forced to choose either to represent people in Parliament or to have a family life. We should change the parliamentary hours so that we can have normal people as Members of the House of Commons.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not necessarily disagree with my hon. Friend's point about the hours, but should like to take her back to the obstacles that are placed in the way of women being selected by any of the parties. My hon. Friend knows the number of meetings that Labour party activists must attend in order to get themselves selected and I am sure that the same is true of the Conservative party. That is where the discrimination starts and where the obstacles are first erected. I mean this genuinely—I have said it outside the House as well as inside—I believe that because of those obstacles women Members, of all parties, are pound for pound better than the average male Member of Parliament because they have had to overcome so many more obstacles. Surely obstacles outside this place should be removed before the obstacles inside.

Ms. Harman: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that there is discrimination in the selection procedures. However, there is also institutionalised discrimination in the hours that the House works and that deters women. We must deal with both problems.

Mrs. Ray Michie: The hon. Lady knows that I agree with all that she is saying and that there should be changes in the working hours of the House. However, I caution her when she says that Members, their support staff and presumably everybody who works here should be able to have a normal family life—both men and women—because she must remember that there is no way in which those of us who come from a long way away, such as from the south-west or the north of England or from Scotland, can have a normal family life during the week.

Ms. Harman: I accept the hon. Lady's point, of which I am deeply aware, and hope to deal with it later.

As I said, we need a change in the hours because late hours deter women from seeking entry to Parliament. I am not suggesting that we should have shorter hours simply to allow women to speak up in Parliament. I am simply saying that when we have a choice—as we do—between a night shift and a day shift, why choose to work at night? Why not choose to work during the day?

As well as deterring women, late hours exile male Members of Parliament from their own families. One of the most awful things about this place is that men rise to speak about the family and to talk about the "party of the family" and the "politics of the family" and tell everybody else what they should be doing with their families, yet one of the pre-conditions of entry to this place for most Members is abandoning the family or, in the case of male Members, delegating the family to their wives. People do not want to hear lessons on family life from those who would not even recognise their own families if they could not look at the pictures of them that appear on their election addresses. It is wrong that the hours of the House should exile male Members of Parliament from their own families.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Lady is making a serious point, as did the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). Canada has opted to restrict parliamentary hours and chosen not to sit during the evening, but that has not done anything to help the problem because Members come from so far away and, of course, the distances are even greater in Canada. I should like to go along with the hon. Lady's objectives and I hope that she will say something about how we can achieve them rather than simply saying that we should meet during the day.

Ms. Harman: I am dealing at present with why we need change. I shall come later to the changes that we might consider, and there are various proposals to examine. We need change because night sittings deter women from seeking entry to this place and because they exile men from their families.

We need change also because this place should be more businesslike and more effective. The later the debate, the lower the quality. The Chamber at 10 o'clock, at the end of an important debate, has a definite after-dinner atmosphere. Few hon. Members can claim to be at their best trying to debate issues at 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Lady is making general points with which most hon. Members would agree, even if we are among those who are here on the mornings—Fridays—when the House sits early. I regard the most important task of Parliament not that of turning out legislation but setting and reflecting the agenda for the nation. The most unfortunate aspect of speeches being made after about 5 o'clock in the evening is that they are not reported, apart from the occasional paragraph here and there. I imagine that the hon. Lady will deal with that during her remarks.

Ms. Harman: The hon. Gentleman makes a helpful point, and I promise to deal with it.

We should change our hours of sitting because the nation cannot properly be represented by Members who become boss-eyed workaholics because they start at 9.30 in the morning and work through until after midnight. I am not suggesting that Members are necessarily swanning it and relaxing in the mornings and simply working in the evenings. Many Members work extremely hard here and claim that as a virtue. "I am the Member of Parliament who represents real free enterprise because I do a 24-hour day, seven days a week. I never take a holiday because I am always working." One can hear it being said. Or some of my hon. Friends may argue that the definition of a good socialist is a person who works 24 hours a day, seven days a week and who never takes a holiday.

Those sentiments describe a person who is not normal. They represent someone who has lost all sense of perspective and who cannot see the wood for the trees. We do not want decisions about the future of the nation and society being taken by people who have lost contact with normal life and who have turned themselves into boss-eyed workaholics.

Adjournment debates provide an important opportunity for Back Benchers to choose subjects that particularly affect their localities and to have the relevant Ministers present to deal with those issues. Unfortunately, such debates occur at perhaps 1 o'clock in the morning, if one is lucky, at about 11 pm, by which time anybody with sense is either relaxing or asleep. Back Benchers are denied the opportunity of debating constituency issues at a reasonable hour, when their local press or television stations might take a closer interest and when their constituents might be told what has been said on their behalf. No purpose is served by forcing such debates to take place late in the night, thereby undermining the parliamentary opportunities available to Back Benchers.

It is expensive to run the House of Commons late into the night. I calculate that in the previous Session sittings after midnight added £250,000 to the cost of running Parliament. Ask the public how they would prefer to see that amount of Government money spent, either on keeping the House of Commons sitting from 2.30 in the afternoon until the small hours or on other items, and I am sure that they would reply, "Spend it on keeping an additional ward open in our local hospital", or "Spend it on a new roof for our local school." Let those who want to maintain our present crazy system of sitting hours justify it, rather than the other way round.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): My hon. Friend makes the interesting point that the burden of proof should rest on those who wish to maintain the present system. In view of the intervention in my hon. Friend's speech to the effect that men would approve of the changes that she is advocating, it would help if the men present today came out and began campaigning with us for change. I accept that some male Members support us, but

it would help if male Members in all parts of the House gave their support so that this will not be seen as a campaign being conducted mainly by women.

Ms. Harman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. As she knows, one of the most outspoken people in favour of change, to whom I pay tribute—because of illness he is unable to be here today; I trust that he will be back next week—is the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). I like the idea of the Father of the House working to bring about change in the mother of Parliaments.

I wish to consider the arguments against change and to strip away their unreality. It is said that we cannot have change because Ministers must be in their Departments in the mornings. The whole business of Government would grind to a halt if Parliament began at 9.30 am, it is said, because Ministers would not be able to do their work properly.

I am in the House every day and I never see Ministers sitting on the Government Front Bench except when the business in hand relates to their Departments. So that argument is a sham and a nonsense. Ministers can work in their Departments while their ministerial colleagues do their own business in the House. It is rare to see Ministers here at, say, Question Time, other than when the questions relate to their Departments.

It is argued, next, that morning sittings of Standing Committees would be interfered with if the House sat earlier. Under the present Administration, as soon as a Standing Committee is constituted it is faced with a sittings motion to permit both morning and afternoon sittings. Immediately, therefore, hon. Members must choose between being in the Committee or in the Chamber. One must organise one's working day around that.

If all the members of a Committee were concerned with the business taking place in the Chamber, they could move to have that Committee adjourned for a particular morning or afternoon sitting. Or if only one or two members of the Committee were involved, they could make a pairing arrangement to enable them to attend the Chamber. It would not be difficult to arrange our affairs in a practical way if we wished to have change. So the time at which Standing Committees meet making change impossible is another sham argument.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point about Standing Committees sitting mornings and afternoons. Not many hon. Members serve on afternoon Committees and the Benches in the Chamber are quite empty later in the day. So hon. Members who are not on Committees do not seem to come here anyway, which reinforces her point.

Ms. Harman: I am grateful for that reinforcement of my argument.

A pernicious argument that is adduced against change is that it would interfere with the activities of hon. Members who have outside interests and other jobs. It is ludicrous to suggest that one can be an effective Member only if it is one's second job. One does not say when visiting the doctor, "You cannot have your feet on the ground. You cannot treat me well and diagnose my ailment because this is your first rather than your second job. Why do you not have outside interests and a second job?"

The job of a Member of Parliament should be his or her first priority. Those who want second jobs can have them, but they should take second place to the work that they do here. If they want to do evening or weekend work, let them do it, but the idea of making the House sit in the evening and at night so that hon. Members can work as barristers in the law courts, as merchant bankers or company directors, is absolutely outrageous. Members of the public want their Members of Parliament to represent them.

The idea that one does not know what is going on in the real world unless one is a barrister is nonsense. Is it in the robing room of the Old Bailey that barristers discover the real interests of the country? Is it in the directors' dining rooms in the City that people learn to keep their feet on the ground? I do not think so. They would be much more likely to have their feet on the ground if they worked a normal day in the House of Commons and did what everyone else does in the evenings and at weekends.

Mr. Wilshire: Earlier, I asked the hon. Lady not to make her argument into a feminist cause. May I also ask her not to make it a Labour party cause.? Her catalogue of other jobs sounded like Conservative jobs and surely she would accept that there are hon. Members from all parties who like to have second jobs, so it is a non-party point, and one with which I agree.

Ms. Harman: I have already paid tribute to the fact that the Father of the House has been a leading light in trying to get our hours changed, and he is, of course, a Tory. It is true that, unfortunately, some Opposition Members are against changing our working hours because they have other jobs. However, the overwhelming weight of people not wanting to change the hours because of other jobs comprises Conservative Members.

Another argument against change is that it is allegedly just a measure to suit London Members. Approximately 20 per cent. of Members of Parliament have constituencies within commuting distance of Westminster. Let us be truthful—many other Members do not live in their constituencies, but have brought their families to be with them in London, so change would affect them too. Therefore, the idea that change would affect only a tiny handful of London Members is not true.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Lady argues her case extremely well, but there are people like me who cannot possibly go home to their wives in the evening because their wives are busy. My wife has interests in and around the constituency and thought it best to bring up our young family there. We could not afford to buy a family home in London. That applies equally—or probably even more so—to Labour Members. If the hon. Lady's suggestion were to extend the period that I and others who live away from London had to spend in London, it would definitely be a non-starter because it would destroy our family life. If we were here nine, 10 or 11 months of the year, it would be hopeless, and that idea is completely out of court.

I am better off working until 10 pm or 11 pm here in order to be able to spend more time with my family at weekends and during the recesses. Goodness only knows what mischief male Members would get up to if, because their wives were not here, they roamed the streets in the evening—that would not apply to me, I hasten to add.

Ms. Harman: I shall come in a moment to the argument about what else the poor male Members would do in the evening.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. While I greatly respect the hon. Lady's contribution, our debate is supposed to be about political events since 1979. The hon. Lady is dealing extensively with matters that have not yet taken place and so are irrelevant. I should like to get on with the subject of the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have looked at the motion carefully and it is fairly wide. I had some doubts myself about whether the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) was correct to pursue the argument that she has chosen, but have decided that it is reasonable. I looked at the motion's wording carefully and think that, at present, she is in order, and I am sure that she will stay in order.

Ms. Harman: I take the point of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). I was seeking to put my comments in context. It is disappointing that after 11 years of a woman Prime Minister, we have not seen any of the changes that would make Parliament more representative of a society in which more than half the people are women. I am not trying to abuse the Standing Orders of the House and believe that what I am saying is in order.

I do not believe that changing the hours would be a measure to suit only London Members. In addition, I do not accept the argument that it would take away from the Opposition the chance to wear down the Government by forcing late sittings because that argument works both ways. When the Government have been worn down by the Opposition, the Opposition have also worn themselves down. I have yet to see any substantive evidence that the direction of Governments has been changed by everyone wearing themselves out. There is evidence that some Members think that it is hairy and macho to be able to say, "I was up all night, three nights running." But most people to whom Members say that, do not have a clue why those Members think it is so clever. It is an entirely internal matter, which is not understood by people outside the House.

Another argument against change is that it did not work when Crossman tried it in 1967. That is because the sitting never started with questions and there was also the opportunity to filibuster. The scheme that he started involved morning sittings carrying on from the tail end of the previous night. I do not think that the Crossman experiment should stop us trying to make changes again.

The final argument, which has also been raised by the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), involves Members saying, "What would I do if I was not here in the House of Commons?" That argument has two parts: first, what would I do? Secondly, what would my wife and constituents think I was doing? In answer to the second part of that argument, I recommend that we keep the Library and Dining Room open so that hon. Members could be in either of those two places. Therefore, those Members who found that, without evening sittings, they fell apart, could go and seek comfort with each other in the Library or the Dining Room of the House.

I shall deal briefly with some proposals for change. The best option would be to operate like any other business or enterprise and have a working day from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm, as is suggested under Labour's plans for the Scottish Assembly. If that change were proposed for Monday to Friday, I know that it would be a problem for out-of-London Members, particularly those from Scotland, Wales and the north-west who do not have the option of being with their families or at home in the evening. We can consider different alternatives. Many other European legislatures have a different sitting pattern for a Monday to reflect the fact that at the beginning of the week people are coming from further away than on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. I shall suggest two proposals: first, we could have Monday as now and——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is pushing her luck with me now. It is one thing to deal with general principles, but when it comes to proposed hours of work, I must draw the line.

Ms. Harman *rose*——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Would it be possible for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) to consider the last line of the motion, which looks forward to the continued contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)? Perhaps if we adjust the working hours to suit my right hon. Friend, we may see more of her in debates. I hope that that might be a suitable subject for discussion.

Ms. Harman: I shall have to side with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, against the hon. Gentleman who is urging me to go out of order. I could not possibly take up his invitation.

Mr. Carrington: I have been sitting patiently listening to the hon. Lady's speech, a great deal of which I agree with. However, both she and I, and indeed the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), are London Members. I understand entirely the considerations that she mentioned about allowing people representing constituencies outside London to spend more time with their families. Both she and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West will know that in London we spend a great deal of time at meetings—party, residents' association and tenants meetings—that take place all evening, every evening and most mornings as well, certainly in my constituency. I am always having to perform a balancing act between being here and being in my constituency, as I am sure is the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). The problem that I would face is that without the reform, mentioned by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, of the way party politics are organised being taken in conjunction with the reform of this House, my working hours would not change, because my place of work would just transfer to the constituency. That might be of benefit, but it would not give me more time with my family.

Ms. Harman: It is always difficult to balance home and work and to balance one part of work against another —but late-night sittings are ridiculous. We should make the House more businesslike and work normal hours and then try to sort out other matters around that.

There is nothing immovable or God-given about our hours. I reassure hon. Members that the pillars of the temple will not fall down if we change those hours. It will not mean the end of society as we know it; civilisation will not crumble away. It will be all right.

I said all this to an hon. Member who is deeply opposed to changing our hours and he said, "We are not going to

do it. You will be an old woman, Harriet, before it happens." We are not prepared to wait. Why should we still wait for the House to move into the 21st century?

It is time that we were more businesslike and more representative; it is time that we had procedures that were understood by people outside the House as well as by us.

11.1 am

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): We heard a powerful speech by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), which included much food for thought. I am glad that the Dining Room will be kept open so that I can contemplate further changes there. My only problem is that I am told that my best speeches have been made after midnight. That is probably because so few people were there to listen. I am not sure how well I would fare if I were called to speak at lunchtime, but the hon. Lady made some valid points about an issue which will continue to attract more interest. The Leader of the House listened to her entire speech, which was an important signal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) gave us a splendid tour d'horizon. I learned a lot from his speech and remembered much at his prompting. Having heard his history of the period before 1979, I find it unsurprising that we have had Conservative Governments continuously since then. The horrors perpetrated by the Labour party in the 1960s and 1970s should never again be visited on this country, and I am sure that the incredible ability of the Conservative party to renew itself from within will ensure that we continue in Government throughout the rest of the decade and into the year 2000.

The most remarkable achievement of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was the transformation of Britain's international image. It was said of Winston Churchill that he found Britain with a lion's heart and gave it a lion's roar. The same could be said of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, who transformed this country domestically—by spreading wealth—and internationally in the most dramatic fashion. That transformation owed much to her courage, determination and vision. The House is rightly glad of the opportunity that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon has given it to recall that transformation with pride and pleasure.

It was highly significant that the last great act that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley performed as Prime Minister was to end the division of Europe which had existed since the second world war. The conference on security and co-operation in Europe treaty in Paris signalled a victory for the values that we hold dear—the rules of law, democracy, freedom to think and to travel, freedom of the press. That triumph was embodied in the treaty that my right hon. Friend signed in Paris and it signalled the collapse of post-war communism, which did so much harm to all those living on the other side of the iron curtain. History will record all this as a remarkable tribute to my right hon. Friend.

Much of the reason why the signing of the treaty became possible was the steadfastness that this country showed during the 1980s, especially in defence, to ensure that Soviet communism knew that it could never win. So the Soviet Union therefore imploded, bringing freedom for the peoples of eastern Europe.

Mr. Favell: Has it occurred to my hon. Friend that it took an iron lady to destroy the iron curtain?

Mr. Taylor: I like my hon. Friend's imagery. The Conservative Government were not prepared to be seduced into easy answers when faced with difficult problems, and they were prepared to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles when the threat from the Soviet Union was at its greatest. I do not have time to go into the full history of the period—I merely wish to show how strongly we have played our part in international politics throughout the 1980s, the reward for which has been the ending of the division of Europe, with the possibility of freedom for people who never believed that they would have the chance to experience it.

This has afforded the Conservative party a wider sense of pleasure. I remember a Polish politician who had been in prison under the old communist regime telling a Conservative party conference that when Solidarity and other organisations started to campaign for change in Poland they realised that socialism could not be reformed but had to be removed. The changes in Europe, especially in the past 12 months, have brought about the triumph of liberal social market economics, which give freedom for the individual and the company rather than state control and direction. That is a victory for which my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley can take considerable credit.

There has been a dramatic domestic transformation since 1979. Wealth has been spread and has grown at such a rate that people who never expected to be well off or to own material assets, who never dreamed of attaining the standard of living that they have today, have done so in ever-increasing numbers not only in the south-east but in every region.

The wealth of the British people has trebled since 1979. Between 1981 and 1988 the value of personal sector physical assets rose from £400 billion to £1,130 billion. The value of personal sector financial assets rose from £340 billion in 1981 to more than £1,100 billion in 1989. That increase in wealth has spread right across the community. Part of the proof of that is the increase in the number of people owning their own homes. It is also to be found in the fact that 11 million people are now share owners—more than the number who are members of trade unions. That transformation has widened the horizons of many people and given them something that they themselves can enjoy and then pass on to their children so that wealth creation and distribution will continue.

There have been dramatic improvements on the economic front. From 1981 to 1989 the United Kingdom had eight successive years of sustained growth averaging more than 3 per cent. That is to the benefit of everyone in Britain and I believe that growth will shortly recover again despite our current economic difficulties. The economies of the United Kingdom and Spain have grown faster in the 1980s than the economies of all the other major European countries. The United Kingdom is no longer investing less than other countries. Growth in business investment since 1980 was second only to that of Japan among the G7 countries. That is a remarkable achievement, given that in the 1970s Britain was always at the bottom of every economic league table. I lived in Paris in the mid-1970s and I remember people almost pitying me because I was British. Now when we travel abroad people know that we are from a country which has pulled itself up by its bootstraps, got its economy going and will quickly get over current difficulties.

[Mr. Taylor]

The standard of living has improved and the take-home pay of a married man on average earnings with two children has increased by more than 30 per cent. since 1979. Over the same period there has been a dramatic improvement in industrial productivity. The Government can take pride in those achievements, which have benefited people in all walks of life all over Britain. When the history books are written, I hope that it will be made clear that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley played her part in leading Britain to better times.

I have said that most people have benefited since 1979. I shall now deal with the concept that everyone in society must benefit if we are to build on our successes. The hon. Member for Peckham commented on how Conservative Members often talk about the family although they are kept from their own families by their work in the House. I shall talk to my wife about that this evening and hear her views. My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley said:

"Government apart, the strengths of a civilised nation depend on the natural authority of the family, the school, the Church and our great institutions. It is when that authority weakens—and it has weakened—that nations turn to the power of the state".

To some extent the sense of community that is so important to our country has declined in recent years. That has not happened only under the present Government—it has been declining since the end of the second world war. We are facing many serious social problems, but they have not been created just by the present Government, who in many cases have looked at them more sympathetically than any previous Government. The idea that the social problems afflicting Britain could have been caused by Thatcherism has rightly been rejected by many independent people, including Charles Murray, who says in his book, "The Emerging British Underclass":

"The increases in crime extend back to the 1950s, and the slope in the graph in violent crime steepened most conspicuously in the late 1960s, long before Mrs. Thatcher came to power. The acceleration in the illegitimacy ratio was taking off in 1979 and was nearly as steep as it would ever get by Mrs. Thatcher's first full year in office. It is hard to credit that Mrs. Thatcher's influence on fertility behaviour among single young women occurred within days of her election." That refutes the often repeated Labour party jibe that we created social problems which did not exist before.

The problems in our society can be solved only by a partnership between Government and active citizens—I do not have time to define that phrase in full, but in short it means people who take an active role in their communities. In the past 11 years we have done much to strengthen community ties and bonds. Sometimes I regret that we have not given enough attention to why we have been doing that. We may have over-stressed some reforms in the context of the efficiency that they would bring to the surface, and perhaps we have over stressed the impact such reforms might have on the individual alone rather than their help in assisting him to play a part in his wider community.

Some of our reforms should be seen more as assisting the development of communities. For example, we have assisted community development by reinforcing the notion outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley in her recent Pankhurst lecture that parenthood is for life, which embraces the proposal that fathers should be made to honour their maintenance commitments to single mothers. We have made parents more aware of the consequences of their children's behaviour and of the implications of their actions in bringing up children, through attendance at court hearings and liability to pay fines, costs and compensation orders incurred by children who become young offenders.

The Children Act 1989 provides a framework for the protection of children. In 1990-91 the Government will be spending £10 billion on a range of benefits for children. That represents an increase of 25 per cent. since 1979. There are key areas which will ultimately lead to a strengthening of community relations. For example, we are encouraging parents to become more involved in the management of schools by devolving budgets to schools so that they can be more responsive to the interests of the community in which they are situated. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House can take personal credit for that as a result of his work as Secretary of State for Education and Science.

The national health service trusts—which are not opting out of the NHS—should be seen as a way of giving back to the local community influence on the way in which the local hospital is run. We often hear constituents bemoaning the fact that they have lost the much-loved small community hospital with which they grew up and upon which they depended. The new self-governing trusts are another way of looking at community hospitals. Those hospitals can be well equipped and of a size which enables them to cope with modern acute medicine. People can start to take pride in them because they know that the red tape which previously interfered with the way in which hospitals were run has been cut and there will therefore be greater responsiveness to the needs of the community, the doctors, potential patients and community health councils. The medical professionals in the hospitals will also have a greater involvement in their running.

The debate about National Health Service trusts is in our minds at the moment because of recent announcements. They should be seen not just in terms of increasing efficiency but in terms of supporting and developing community relationships and of strengthening the identities of the community and the people within it. There are other areas in which the Government can take credit for helping people to identify more with the community. In the short time that I have been in the House, I have tried to do much to encourage employee share ownership which is now established as an important issue. Employees who own shares in the company for which they work have a greater identity of purpose and, ultimately, if the company is successful the employees have a greater likelihood of capital gain and therefore a real sense of wealth creation. That is an important Conservative principle. Wealth creation is valid in itself, but it is morally acceptable only if it leads to widely distributed rather than to a narrowed base of wealth ownership.

The Conservative Government can do many other things to build on what we have achieved. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said, we have to continue our work in the inner cities so as to give people there greater hope, not just in terms of environment, buildings and housing, but in terms of educational opportunities. Inner city problems are serious. Unless we tackle them, they ferment other problems which problems are impossible for Governments alone to deal with.

The Conservative Government understand that they cannot help people or remove social problems simply by diktat. That is a form of social engineering which the Labour party wishes to pursue. The Conservative Government have shown, through the measures that I have outlined this morning, that they understand that the way to deal with social problems is by encouraging people to work together to help others in the community in which they live, and that policy has been followed by successive Conservative Administrations. To do that, people have to have the freedom to spend money as they wish, which means a preference for lower taxation. Government resources must be distributed at the lowest possible level in the community, such as schools and hospitals, rather than being directed from above.

We have also to ensure that the people who are most in need get assistance not only from the Government but from the people living in the communities in which they are suffering. People in need will be helped only by a partnership between Government and active citizens. That vision of the future has gone throughout the 1980s under my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and has been taken up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who wishes to have an open and mobile society. That is the vision of all Conservatives.

To achieve our aims, we must give people sufficient opportunities, not just to pursue selfish aims but to enable them to do things for other people such as build communities so that people have pride in what is around them. By doing that they will ensure that our communities are cohesive, stable and happier. In those circumstances. I have no doubt that we shall build on what we have achieved in the past decade with another decade of Conservative Government.

11.22 am

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I congratulate the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on allowing us, with this panegyric to Thatcherism, to look at the past decade. Although his notion is somewhat naive and unrealistic, it gives me an opportunity to acknowledge freely the achievements of the former Prime Minister, first in becoming Prime Minister, and her courage, but not the policies with which she led the country over the past decade.

The hon. Gentleman talked about people being stabbed in the back and the politics of the alliance party. Whatever happened during the merger of the two alliance parties, if there were knives used they were rubber knives compared with the lethal knives used to stab the former Prime Minister in the back. Like the rest of the country and the world, I watched in astonishment as this was done to a Prime Minister who only two months before had received a tremendous ovation for 10 minutes at her party's conference. Suddenly, she was gone. The Conservative party has done an extraordinary thing that will not soon be forgotten.

Mr. Amess: I accept what the hon. Lady is saying, but there is a difference between our parties. If she were to engage my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) in a private conversation, the hon. Lady would know that my right hon. Friend is telling us to unite behind our new leader. The alliance parties stabbed one another in the back and the parties were destroyed as a result. That is not the case with our party.

Mrs. Michie: I do not want to get into an argument about the alliance parties. As I said, we have emerged strong and united. We are the only party in the House of Commons that is united on the main political questions of the day. The Tory party should watch itself. We shall see how united it remains after this abrasive contest.

The motion deals with the political developments of the past decade. We entered the Thatcher decade with inflation at 10·3 per cent. and we are entering the 1990s with inflation at 10·6 per cent. Unemployment was rising then, and it rose to unprecedented heights before falling. Now we are facing rising unemployment again. We were enjoined to get on our bikes to seek jobs, and many did. However, they were often unable to take their families with them because of lack of housing. With high mortgage rates and high inflation, the encouragement of easy money and the plastic card, the feeling was that those who were successful were the ones who mattered. All that has contributed to the breakdown in family life and the increase in single-parent families.

The nationalised utilities were turned over to the private sector. Instead of real competition in the market place, public monopolies were substituted by private monopolies.

I was astonished at the way in which the Government attacked every aspect of society. They went for education and the teachers, who became desperately demoralised. They went for the health service, and not just the doctors but everybody who worked in it. They went for the community as a whole with the poll tax. Instead of building on good will, they destroyed the good will of many workers. It is sad that doctors and consultants nearing retirement age, but with perhaps five years to go, want to get out early because the health service has been destroyed.

As a Scot, I naturally mention Scotland. This eulogy to Thatcherism, as the hon. Member for Basildon must know, does not apply in Scotland. The Government did one or two things in Scotland with which I agreed. However, we must never forget that the Conservative party paid the political price of its policies, with the result that it was reduced to a rump of only 10 Tory Members representing Scottish constituencies. No amount of change at the top will rectify the betrayal of the Scottish people over the past 10 years in a number of areas.

The Thatcher years began with the repeal of the Scotland Act 1706. The great betrayal was that the former Prime Minister promised that, if the Scottish people voted no in the referendum, the Conservatives would devise a better form of devolution. The hon. Member for Basildon said that he would never let the people of this country forget about the Liberal alliance. The people of Scotland will never forget and will never forgive the betrayal of that promise. The majority of Scottish people voted yes to the setting up of a Scottish assembly. However, despite the Tory love of the first-past-the-post system and majority rule, that promise was disregarded. I wonder whether the former Prime Minister reflected on that as she saw herself being pushed aside, despite the fact that she was the candidate who received most votes in the Tory leadership contest.

We believe in a property-owning democracy and we agreed to the sale of council houses, but we were not led to understand that they would not be replaced. Therefore, homelessness in Scotland rose from 7,493 in 1978-79 to the staggering figure of nearly 29,000 in 1988-89. In 1981, the

[Mrs. Michie]

number of English homeless people was 70,000. By 1989 it had risen to 126,000. That does not fit in with the eulogy of the former Prime Minister's achievements during the past 10 years.

After 10 years of Conservative government, there is a real housing crisis in rural areas of Scotland and, I believe, in rural areas of other parts of the United Kingdom. Few houses are being built in those areas. Local people have been priced out of the inflated housing market. Consequently they continue to leave rural areas in increasing numbers. Low-cost, affordable housing is not available to them.

Mr. Favell: Many people argue that the problem in rural areas is that tight planning regulations prevent cheap houses from being built. Is the hon. Lady in favour of a relaxation of planning controls?

Mrs. Michie: In my experience, that is not a problem. The problem is that district councils do not have the finance to build low-cost, affordable housing. The planning regulations do not prevent the building of houses for local people.

The forcing of the poll tax on the Scottish people a year in advance of the rest of the United Kingdom was the beginning of the former Prime Minister's ultimate downfall. The rest is history. It is unfortunate that hon. Members did not listen when the poll tax was foisted on the people of Scotland, totally against their will.

The Government have failed over the years to use their political clout to support the Scottish steel industry. Time and again the industry has proved its ability by breaking productivity records. How little the Government care about the Scottish steel industry is shown by the fact that they are prepared to see it disappear altogether. British Steel is displaying unprincipled and corrupt practices, the likes of which I had never expected to witness. We have reached the stage of trying to prevent Ravenscraig from being dismantled by mothballing it until, at the least, we can find a buyer to take it over. British Steel, however, does not want competition. It appears, too, that the Government do not want British Steel to have any competitors. The order books at Clydesdale Tubes are bursting at the seams; the firm is turning away orders. The lack of investment in the mills, however, means that they are running at only half capacity.

The most significant political development of the last 10 years has been the setting up of the Scottish constitutional convention. The Government's unfortunate and arrogant refusal even to acknowledge the wish of the majority of Scottish people to look after their own affairs spells continued disaster for them in that part of the United Kingdom. I do not understand why the Government cannot see that and why they do not listen to the arguments. They appear to be blind to what is going going on in Scotland.

The starting point of the convention was the claim of right. It privides a firm foundation and is firmly committed to the Scottish understanding of sovereign power emanating from the people. It rejects the belief in the absolute sovereignty of this place. Members of the convention come from all walks of Scottish life, including the political parties, with the exception of the two extremes —the Conservative party and the Scottish National party. Nevertheless, members of both parties serve on the convention.

After 18 months of deliberation, we reached agreement on the principles of a fair electoral system. The convention rejected the first-past-the-post system used for elections to this Parliament, which has led to minority Government after minority Government coming to power to govern the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of its people. A Scottish parliament would not go down that road. It would adopt a system whereby the seats won more accurately reflected the votes cast for each party.

The convention spelt out a defined range of powers and responsibilities. It did not shirk the need for revenue-raising powers. Without them, a Scottish parliament would be merely a talking shop that was not subject to the financial discipline that is so essential. The accusation that the power to vary income tax rates would lead to additional tax burdens on the Scottish people and that therefore all business would flee the country is so much nonsense. What Scottish Government would do that to their own country, business and economy?

Agreement was reached on single-tier local authorities and on the powers of a Scottish parliament. The Liberal Democrats played an important role in the work of the convention. Its conclusions go a long way towards our goal of seeking federal government in a United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Did the convention consider the number of Scottish Members of Parliament who ought to come here from Scotland if these arrangements came to pass?

Mrs. Michie: That has been discussed. We believe that that will be a matter for decision here. However, it would be no problem for my party. Without doubt the number of Scottish Members of Parliament who would have seats in this place would be reduced. That would be good. I certainly would not accept that Scottish Members could not vote on the Manchester Sewers Bill, or whatever, or that English Members could not vote on Scottish matters. I foresee us looking after our domestic affairs but sending representatives to this Parliament, which I hope will evolve into a federal parliament, and voting on United Kingdom affairs. We are quite happy about that.

Mr. Bottomley: Do the Liberal Democrats believe that the numbers in Scotland should come down to reflect the electorate in England and Wales? The Act of Union gives extra seats to the Scots. Would her party support a disproportionately large electorate for Scottish Members because they would not have to concern themselves with English and Welsh legislation?

Mrs. Michie: The hon. Gentleman is asking for much detail on the reform of boundaries, and so on. The land mass of Scotland is equal to half that of England and Wales. I do not want the Scots to try to dominate this Parliament. What a difference it would make to hon. Members if Scottish matters were discussed in Edinburgh. They would have plenty of time to go for dinner or could go home earlier because the Scots would not be making a fuss and going on about legislation all the time. I would look for and welcome such a change in the procedures of the House.

It disturbs me that we cannot get through to Conservative Members what we are saying. The Minister

is probably an anglo-Scot. I know that he went to Merchiston Castle school in Edinburgh, which is a very good school. He should have some understanding of the aspirations of the Scottish people. Why do the Government welcome the freedom attained by eastern European countries and the Balkan states but refuse Scotland the right to govern herself while remaining a partner in the United Kingdom? The Government may say, "We do not want you as a partner", but then they should say so. Liberal Democrats say that we should like to remain a partner in the United Kingdom. Hon. Members should not be so dismissive. They should look closely at the scene in Scotland. They might not know what is going on there, but they should think deeply about what is likely to happen unless they respond.

The Prime Minister said that he would listen, and he spoke of people having pride and dignity. He and his Government should understand that the demand of the Scottish people will not go away. It is extraordinary that a country such as Scotland, which has its own legal and education systems, does not have its own legislative forum. Its position must be unique in the western world. We want the space to grow and to develop our own talents and to decide our own destiny and political future while remaining a useful and equal partner in the United Kingdom. I do not think that that is too much to ask.

11.43 am

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) mentioned the possibility of a devolved Parliament in Scotland. As an onlooker, it occurs to me that, 300 years after the Act of Union in 1707, a devolved Parliament would inevitably lead to tensions and, ultimately, to a separation of our two countries, which would be a tragedy. We have been through so much together. We are inter-married, we have conquered empires together, have defeated dictators together, have a single currency and live within almost a single island. Tensions would inevitably arise. Give politicians a talking shop and, as we have seen with the European Parliament, they soon want power. If Scotland wants to go down that road, that is for her to decide, but that is how it would inevitably end.

Mrs. Ray Michie: The hon. Gentleman says that it is inevitable that Scotland would seek total separation from the rest of the United Kingdom, but that is to deny what happens around the world, particularly the western world. All the successful economies are based on a federal system of government and devolved power to the nation states or provinces. They all work successfully. The Scottish people do not want to cut their links with the United Kingdom, but I warn Conservative Members that unless they are prepared to listen they may be pushed down that road.

Mr. Favell: I disagree with the hon. Lady, although I hear what she says.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak this morning because I wish to pay tribute to a most remarkable lady —my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). I met her only once, albeit briefly, before I was elected, to have the normal candidate's photograph taken. In 1979, when I was learning all about socialism, I fought the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Something that gave me a few extra votes against the monumental pile of votes that are cast for the hon. Gentleman was that I had a photograph taken with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There was another interesting development in that campaign. The hon. Gentleman lived at a place called Skinner's hall and the Liberal candidate lived at Skinner's street. They could not get away from the idea that they were fighting Skinner. I remember the photograph with the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). I do not think that it helped at all in my mining constituency. I look forward to the next general election and the hon. Gentleman sticking up a photograph of the right hon. Member for Finchley in Stockport and losing his seat.

Mr. Favell: That is unlikely to happen, but it is nice to see the hon. Member for Bolsover at the Dispatch Box. I have enormous respect for him. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, he knows his mind and he is not afraid to speak it, unlike many Labour Members, and no more so than the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who tried to pretend that his party is united on Europe, knowing very well that behind him it is split virtually 50:50.

The second time that I met my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was in the summer following my election in 1983 when, as with many new Members, we were invited to No. 10 with our wives. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), who introduced the motion so ably, is nodding. It was a swelteringly hot day. My wife, Susan, and I were greeted by my right hon. Friend and Denis Thatcher. After about an hour, all the men were standing in a certain way because it was so hot and the ladies were dabbing their brows. My wife said to me, "Just look at that woman." The Prime Minister looked as though she had just walked straight out of the shower, despite her having had a busy day. There was not a bead of perspiration, unlike everyone else in the room. My wife said, "That is will power." She has certainly had will power ever since and especially in the past few weeks. She has shown extraordinary will power, and I know that Opposition Members respect her for that.

When we went to No. 10 Downing street, my right hon. Friend showed us the Cabinet room. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is the only Member present today who has served in the Cabinet room.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley showed us the great oval table and the places where various members of the Cabinet sat. She said, "This is where I sit", and we all dutifully looked at the place. She then said, "Behind me is a portrait of Robert Walpole. He was Prime Minister for 21 years. Now there's a thought." She has not made her 21 years as Prime Minister, but she has made eleven and a half years. I have no doubt that we shall stay in power for 21 years—until the turn of the century—thanks to the way in which she dealt with the leadership battle last week. Several of my hon. Friends have touched on that point.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was elected leader of the party in 1975. I make no apology for the fact that I am a Yorkshire man who represents a seat on the other side of the Pennines. Yorkshire men were doing very well in 1975. Harold Wilson, who was born in Huddersfield, was leading the country. Geoffrey Boycott was born in Yorkshire. If only he had been born in

[Mr. Favell]

Lancashire, things might have been very different for Yorkshire cricket. Then there was Arthur Scargill who was also born in Yorkshire. They were three great pillars of the establishment.

Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley could not do much about Geoffrey Boycott and Yorkshire cricket has not recovered, but she has certainly done something about the two other men. In the 1970s, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx said that Labour was the natural party of government. When I was campaigning furiously against the hon. Member for Bolsover, people said that socialism was inevitable, that it was spreading throughout the world and that there was no way in which the trend could be reversed. But my right hon. Friend has reversed the trend, not only here but throughout eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Arthur Scargill was riding high at that time because he had just brought down the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). Arthur Scargill thought that he was unassailable; and he tried again in 1984-85 during the miners' strike. There were many faint hearts throughout the country and in industry; there were even a few faint hearts among Conservative Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley defeated Arthur Scargill through her will power. He had to be defeated because he thought that force could overcome the democratically elected Government.

I was one of the few Conservative Members who went to see the picketing at Orgreave. it was an extraordinary experience. Watching the scene on the television in the warmth of one's home, one could not appreciate what was happening. A pall of evil hung over that place. There were 2,000 policemen and 4,000 others, many of whom were not miners. The troublemakers were trying to destroy democracy in this country. It was a remarkable period in our history and no one but my right hon. Friend could have achieved that victory. It was a victory not for our party or for the Government, but for democracy.

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind that during the 1972 and 1974 strikes Arthur Scargill was not the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers? It is true that he played a part in Yorkshire.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to sum up the legacy of the past 11 years during which his right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister, he should consider this maxim. The former Prime Minister has been stabbed in the back by her own people and has been turned out in the night like a wounded dog. Arthur Scargill is still in office.

Mr. Favell: Arthur Scargill is not even a member of the council of the Trades Union Congress because he does not have enough members for him to be able to demand a position there. He is a wounded dog with no power.

Mr. Skinner: The right hon. Member for Finchley has gone.

Mr. Favell: Her memory and her achievements live on. She will go down in history as the greatest peacetime Prime Minister this country has ever seen. Arthur Scargill will go down in history as a miserable and abject failure.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley became Prime Minister in 1979, it seemed that the decline of Britain was inevitable. She arrested it by one simple action: she put trust in the people. She trusted them to buy and to run their own homes. The Labour party said that council house tenants could not be trusted to look after their own houses.

My right hon. Friend insisted that industry took responsibility for industry. She made it clear that the days of subsidies, of bailing out companies and of debacles such as Upper Clyde Shipbuilders were over. She trusted industry to run its own affairs. Before the hon. Member for Bolsover intervenes, I must say that it is a pity that we have not done the same with the farmers. If we had done so, we should not have had the debacle in the negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade over the past two or three days. My right hon. Friend also put trust in trade union members to run the trade unions. We no longer see trade union leaders parade as the great leaders of our nation.

My right hon. Friend has privatised our nationalised industries. Even as recently as last year, when water was being privatised, people said that it was impossible. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) pointed out that a survey showed that only 2 million people were in favour of water privatisation, but that 5 million of them applied for shares. As my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) said, there are more shareholders in this country than there are trade union leaders.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Favell: I will give way in a moment.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) has said that he wants an open society—a society of equal opportunity in which everyone has a chance. The foundations for that society have been firmly laid by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley. Her memory will live on, and we should all be grateful to her for all that she has achieved for this country.

11.56 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I did not realise that the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) had finished—I thought that he was giving way to me. In fact, he has given way, but on a slightly more permanent basis than I had thought. I had intended to ask him about the transformation to a share-owning democracy that he believed that the blessed right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) had achieved, but I now have the opportunity to speak for myself. It is not surprising that many people have applied for shares in electricity, because the shares have been undervalued. People will be able to make a lot of money very quickly. I do not think that that is a good deal. If one offers people buckets of money, one should not be too surprised if they grab them with both hands. That is what happens if the Government undersell the assets—people will obviously realise that they can make a lot of money.

The hon. Member for Stockport implied that people were dedicated to a share-owning democracy, but the statistics show that the vast majority of the increased number of shareholders—there has certainly been an increase—own shares in only one company. That does not seem to represent the ideal of the share-owning

democracy. Most of the people inovlved in the privatisation shares get in and get out as fast as they can, making as much money as they can at the expense of the rest of us. I do not regard privatisation as handing the assets to the people. In fact, it means taking the assets away from all the people and handing them over to a smaller number of the people at the expense of the great majority. Few people in my constituency or my borough have been able to take the opportunity to make money from undervalued assets. Under the Government, the percentage of shares owned by the institutions has increased while the percentage owned by individual shareholders has gone down.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The logic of the hon. Gentleman's position is to seek massive renationalisation. Is that what he wants?

Mr. Banks: You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will know —as few others do—that I have recently been elevated to the Front Bench. I understand that certain responsibilities come with aspirations to high office, but I have my own personal views and I shall express them—having made it quite clear, in case the leader of my party is listening or reads *Hansard*, that they are not the views of the Labour party as a whole. I would certainly renationalise—in most cases, without compensation. Involvement in capitalism may bring gains, but one has to accept that fingers can get burnt. Some people will have been able to make a fast buck, but others must accept that a risk is involved. The Leader of the House asked me my opinion and I have given it. I stress once again that it is my own view and not that of my party. Personally, I would renationalise every one of the public assets that have been so shamefully sold off.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I accept that we are hearing the hon. Gentleman's own views and not those of his party. An employee who takes shares in his business may sell them at a profit or he may keep them as a mark of his long-term commitment to his firm. Would the hon. Gentleman take shares back without compensation in the latter case? Would he apply his policy to the shareholders, owners and employees of National Freight and to the 80 per cent. of Thames Water employees who have shares in that company?

Mr. Banks: Once again, I emphasise that I am expressing my own opinions and not my party's policies. I am talking hypothetically because it is unlikely that I shall ever be leader of my party or persuade it to accept my views. One would have to approach each of the privatised assets somewhat differently, just as one would have to approach shareholders differently. In certain cases, compensation would have to be paid. If a Labour Government pursued such policies, it would probably be right for that Government to repurchase shares. Share prices go down as well as up, and when things go wrong in an industry the shares can be purchased cheaply. In respect of an individual whose only source of income was shares —perhaps the proverbial widow in Wolverhampton who owns a small number of shares—one would expect decent compensation to be paid. The hon. Gentleman involved me in an interesting discussion although, as we are talking so hypothetically, I wonder whether it is worth my taking the time of the House.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman is refreshingly frank. Perhaps he will be similarly frank about the number of his colleagues in the Labour party who would support his views on renationalisation without compensation, as I am sure that the electorate would like to know whether that view is likely to prevail after the general election.

Mr. Banks: I am, indeed, refreshingly frank—that is probably why, in party-political terms, I am such a lousy politician. One of the things that I dislike about party politics is that one so often has to subordinate one's personal opinions to a policy with which one does not agree so as to present a united front. I believe in speaking my mind, even though what I say may not convey a great deal to anyone and even though I usually say it at great expense to myself. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that those who share my views are a minority in the Labour party, confined to the campaign group. As I said recently, the campaign group and the left of the Labour party have not been doing very well. I was recently appointed official stretcher-bearer when the campaign group decided that it needed such an office. The hon. Gentleman will certainly not get any comforting statistics from me to suggest that I am expressing the opinions of the vast majority of people in the parliamentary Labour party, because I am not—I remain very much in the minority.

Having been totally diverted from what I intended to say, I return to the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his luck in the ballot and apologise to him for having missed the first part of his speech, especially as I understand that it was the most interesting part. The terms of the motion are suitably sycophantic—so much so that I have submitted the whole text of his motion to *Private Eye* for consideration for the award of the order of the brown nose. I am convinced that I shall win the £10 prize —if I do, I will go halves with the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman has been steadfast in his support for the previous Prime Minister. When the right hon. Member for Finchley had become as popular as the bubonic plague in the rest of the country and in her own party, the hon. Gentleman was like the boy who stood on the burning deck—prepared to be consumed in the flames to stand by his right hon. Friend in her difficulties. I commend the hon. Gentleman for his steadfastness. His support for the right hon. Lady has never wavered. In the end, he found himself in the minority, although I take his point about the votes because the Conservative party never got round to holding a third ballot. It is fortunate that the Conservative party can change its rules so readily —when it comes to standards and practices, there is nothing that the Tories will not change at the drop of a hat. Although the hon. Gentleman was prepared to stand by the right hon. Member for Finchley, however, many others in his party were ready to dump the pilot overboard and did just that.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It occurs to me that the resignation of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then Chancellor may have started the whole process as that was what got us to concentrate on Europe.

Mr. Banks: Never before has anyone deserted at such a critical time, and with such a perverse effect on his own career—if the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) had held his courage just a little longer he might have been

[Mr. Banks]

PPS to the new Prime Minister. But that is politics for you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will have the chance to climb a little further up the greasy pole than I have in due course, or perhaps he and I are both losers.

Before we allow Conservative Members to confer a sainthood on the right hon. Member for Finchley and erect a shrine to her, we should examine the reasons why the Tory party dumped her, because that is what it did. The Conservatives dumped her because it was generally considered in the party—certainly in the parliamentary party—that the Tories stood no chance of winning the next election if they kept her. If they had thought that they could win the next general election with her, they would have stuck with her. Nothing concentrates hon. Members' minds more than the thought of losing their seats, and enough Conservative Members in marginal seats were convinced that they would lose those seats at the election, so the right hon. Lady had to go.

Mr. Wilshire: That sounds like an explanation of why the Labour party is considering ditching its leader.

Mr. Banks: Even if there were a desire to dump the leader of the Labour party—I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is not—we could not change our rules. We are unlike the Conservative party in that respect. The leader of the party is elected with the support of all wings of our movement, the majority of Members of the parliamentary party and the majority of delegates at conference, which means the trade unions as well as constituency activists. There is, in any case, no desire to dump my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—why on earth should we want to do that? My right hon. Friend forced the former Prime Minister to resign by cornering her. It would be absurd to contemplate moving against our leader. The difference is that we know that we are going to win with our leader, but Conservative Members knew that they were going to lose with theirs. That is why they dumped her.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: For the benefit of those who do not know all the Labour party rules, is not the real reason why there cannot be an effective contest for the leadership of the Labour party the fact that it takes six months for the process to work? There has to be a special conference and all the rest of it. I do not want to trespass out of order, but this point comes within the terms of the motion. Is it not also the case that in 1983, when the present Leader of the Opposition was chosen to lead his party, 203 Labour Members voted—101 against the right hon. Gentleman and 102 for him? I admit that that is a majority, but it is nothing like so good a majority as my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) had a few weeks ago.

Mr. Banks: Yes, but in 1983 my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) was not the party leader. He was one of the candidates. The Conservative party dumped its leader who had been there for 12 or 15 years—I cannot remember exactly how long, but it seemed like a lifetime to me and to many people in this country.

The right hon. Member for Finchley led her party to three victories. The hon. Member for Basildon made that point because he is one of her staunchest devotees—so staunch that in his speech he was prepared to try to rekindle her image for us as a wonderful person who made a great contribution. If that is so, why did Conservative Members dump her? All the accolades from the hon. Member for Basildon cannot camouflage the fact that she was dumped as a successful leader of the party. Conservative Members know that what counts in politics is not what one has achieved in the past but what one will achieve in the future. Conservative Members knew that they could not win an election with the right hon. Member for Finchley and her policies, so they dumped her.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has only just joined us, but I am sure that he has something useful to say.

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that many people in the Labour party would like to dump the Leader of the Opposition, who has achieved very little and will achieve even less in future?

Mr. Banks: It was my own fault for giving way to someone who had literally just walked into the Chamber. Had the hon. Gentleman come in just a couple of minutes earlier, he could have joined in the discussion on that very subject. Perhaps I should send him a specially annotated copy of *Hansard* on Monday so that we can have a private discussion about it elsewhere.

Another reason why the right hon. Member for Finchley was dumped is that she had become arrogant, autocratic and out of touch with real people. She was surrounded by people who were giving her the advice that she wanted to hear.

One of the symbols of the right hon. Lady's lack of contact with reality was the erection of those preposterous iron gates—the Nicolae Ceausescu memorial gates—at the end of Downing street. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that when he becomes Prime Minister those gates will go. They are a symbol of the division between the right hon. Member for Finchley and the people of this country—she was so popular that she was not allowed to walk on the streets of London because she was an incitement to public disorder.

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman is aware that those gates were erected because of the brave stand of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) against the IRA and its determination to try to kill her as it nearly did during the party conference in Brighton. It ill becomes the hon. Gentleman to make such remarks about such a brave and courageous woman.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Lady makes what she thinks is a good point. The gates have been there for just 18 months, but the former Prime Minister had been there for 10 years. I am not averse to all the protection in the world being provided for our political leaders, including those of the Conservative party. I have no desire to see anything unpleasant happen to them, but there are other ways of providing security. Those gates are ornamental—the place looks like Buckingham Palace. I thought that they were going to have the changing of the guards outside those gates. The right hon. Member for Finchley had delusions of grandeur and those gates are an obvious symbol of that.

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the IRA has stooped to the point of sending suicide cars down roads to explode outside buildings, killing people who had been tied into the seats to deliver the bombs. The gates to which the hon. Gentleman referred are an attempt to protect the Prime Minister against such dastardly methods.

Mr. Banks: I have just said that security must be provided. Lamentably and regrettably, in 1990 security for the Prime Minister and leading Members of the Government has to be of an order which we had hoped never to see in this country. I am not arguing about the security angle, but I believe that the monstrosity at the end of Downing street says more about the delusions of grandeur of the right hon. Member for Finchley than about the need for security.

I have a few other things to say about the right hon. Member for Finchley. If the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) finds what I have just said unacceptable, she will find it horrendous when I really get my teeth into the former Prime Minister. The hon. Member for Basildon said that he hoped that the right hon. Member for Finchley would make a political contribution. Of course, she immediately threatened to do that when she said that she would remain as a back-seat driver. Perhaps it has been misinterpreted, but, if it was, it was also misinterpreted by the new Prime Minister who did not appear over-impressed with such a view.

For the sake of it, and for what it is worth, I can tell the House that I believe that the new Prime Minister, who wants to change a number of policies, will find it necessary to clear the decks as fast as he can. I also do not believe that the right hon. Member for Finchley will come into the Chamber very often, although she may sit here as a spectre. The more the hon. Member for Basildon and others table motions like the one that we are debating today, the more the leader of his party will be aware of her. There is only one way in which the new Prime Minister can deal with that—and with the baggage that she has left him, which he and many other Conservative Members want to dump. That includes the poll tax. The Government must also put more money into the national health service and into education. They can do all that only by calling a general election. I am absolutely confident that we shall have a general election in the spring as the new Prime Minister tries to clear the decks. I hope that we will have one then, because we shall win.

Mr. Wilshire: While I profoundly disagree with the hon. Gentleman, I have a great deal of respect for the amount of hard work that he puts in. Therefore, I am sure that he will have taken the trouble to read the speech in which the reference to the back-seat driver was made. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the comment was quoted out of context. The point is that, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was leaving the Government, she would be available to advise the Americans and President Bush, particularly as they deal with the Gulf crisis. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was aware of that context.

Mr. Banks: I cannot believe that President Bush will turn to the right hon. Member of Finchley for advice.

Mr. John Marshall: He certainly would not turn to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: Of course he would not, because I would not give him the kind of advice that he would want to hear. Also I am not the Prime Minister and am never likely to be.

Ms. Harman: Oh!

Mr. Banks: I am sorry if it comes as a nasty blow to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) to hear me announce that I shall never be Prime Minister, but I recall the fate of various hon. Members who claimed that they would be Prime Minister. I remember Kilroy-Silk walking in and saying that he would be Prime Minister, and look what happened to him—that Kilroy programme is a fate worse than death. More recently, someone else marked it out on the back of a card but ended up as a stalking horse and is now back where he started in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for the Environment. So perhaps history proves that I am more likely to succeed if I say that I am not going to be Prime Minister than if I say that I am. I also happen to be a realist, and I know that there is no chance of it happening.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Finchley's remark was misinterpreted and I have misinterpreted it again, but that is life. The right hon. Lady will no doubt be writing her memoirs. I look forward to them being remaindered at W. H. Smith very rapidly. She will pass quickly into history, as so many ex-Prime Ministers have. Conservative Members must realise that charisma in politics is usually attached to the office and rarely to the person. Like other ex-Prime Ministers whom I shall not mention, the right hon. Lady will quickly pass into history and become yesterday's woman. There will be an afterlife, as the hon. Member for Basildon has said, but I doubt whether we shall hear a great deal about her after the next election. For all her tenacity and determination, I have always believed the right hon. Lady to be fairly dull and unimaginative —someone who did not give much thought to what was going on. Nevertheless, she had many attributes. She was perfectly equipped as a party politician because she had a great deal of low cunning—not enough to allow her to survive, but she had a lot of grim determination and resoluteness. In terms of intellectual and theoretical ability in politics, however, she had but little of that—which is one reason why in the end so many other European leaders were able to run rings around her. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Yes—one judges a politician not by what a politician says, but by what a politician does. The impact of a politician on history is seen only when one takes a step away from the time when the politician was active. I remember hearing the Prime Minister say many times, "Never, never, never," at the Dispatch Box, and then go to Europe and give way because they out-manoeuvered her. History was not on her side.

Mr. John Marshall *rose*—

Mr. Banks: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he will make the debate a little more informed.

Mr. Marshall: I listened with interest to the comment that other European leaders managed to run rings around my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the dramatic changes which took place in respect of the common agricultural policy would not have taken place without the single-minded determination and constancy of purpose of the then British Prime Minister, who forced the

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leaders of other European countries to cut farm output? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the French agreed to milk quotas in a sense of good spirit? Was it not because our then Prime Minister forced them to do so?

Mr. Banks: The right hon. Lady obviously would have had some success with some administrative changes. I am not saying that she was a complete vacuum and that no one took any notice of her. I am talking of the big idea. The right hon. Lady was not able to grasp the big idea. In the end, Europe was her political graveyard because she could not grasp what was going on in Europe. When we talk about all the changes in Europe, we do not have to give any accolades to the right hon. Lady. She just happened to be there at the time. For what she did, developments could have been hindered. She acknowledged that she could do business with Mr. Gorbachev, which is likely to be the most memorable thing that the right hon. Lady ever said. When the history of this most exciting period is written, Mr. Gorbachev's contribution to politics—not the right hon. Lady's—will be seen as the seminal version, the one that changed the history of the world. The right hon. Lady was not intellectually up to that. She had no imagination and no grasp of what was going on. She saw the world from a street corner in Grantham. That was her contribution to wider world politics. The hon. Member for Basildon may not like what I say about her, but I am convinced that her part in history will be a fairly small footnote.

There are not many monuments to Thatcherism, although there are some visible ones not very far from this place. The empty county hall is a monument to Thatcherism. A little further down the river, the ruined Battersea power station is another. The monstrosity of Canary wharf is another visible monument to Thatcherism. There has been no real social or economic revolution in this country in the past eleven and a half years. Things have changed, but they usually changed for the worse rather than for the better. People tend to be more selfish these days—and more violent—and society is certainly far more divided than it was when the right hon. Lady was elected.

The hon. Member for Basildon talked about the economic miracle that we have lived through. You must excuse me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I must have been asleep as I have not noticed any economic miracle. Constituents in my area of Newham, which the hon. Member for Basildon knows well, may be excused for questioning whether there has been an economic miracle. What kind of economic miracle leaves us with the largest balance of payments deficit in manufacturing trade in our history? What kind of economic miracle leaves us with the highest inflation rate and the highest interest rates in Europe? There is something interesting about that as well.

The new Prime Minister—I hope that I am not misquoting him, as I have been accused of misquoting his predecessor—said that he thought that interest rates would come down when Chelsea wins the championship. The right hon. Gentleman and I are Chelsea supporters and we know that Chelsea has been playing very well recently, but we are well adrift in the league—about 16 points behind Liverpool and Arsenal—so, unless we have legislation to remove those points from the top two teams and to make it illegal for any team to beat Chelsea during the rest of the season, I doubt whether interest rates will come down. If I were asked what I most wanted—if I were pushed into one of my franker moments—I would say that I would prefer to see Chelsea with the championship rather than see interest rates come down. No doubt, for saying that, I will get many letters from irate shopkeepers, business people and others who do not support Chelsea.

If an economic miracle has taken place, why do we look so sick in comparison with the rest of Europe on the indices that I have mentioned? We also still have one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe. That has been camouflaged by 40 changes in the method of calculation. One of the more intellectual members of the parliamentary Labour party, my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), has just arrived from Chester-le-Street. He will be able to tell me whether I have got it wrong. We have had about 40 changes in the way in which unemployment rates in this country are calculated, so it is no wonder that the Government have been able to camouflage a very worrying underlying real employment rate in this country.

In terms of the social successes of Thatcherism in the past eleven and a half years, a new book entitled "Poverty —The Facts", by Carey Oppenheim of the Child Poverty Action Group, states:

> "In 1987 over 10 million people, nearly one fifth of the population of Britain were living in poverty measured by either of the most common definitions. In 1979 4·9 million people, nearly one tenth of the population in Britain, were living in poverty defined as income below 50 per cent. average. Between 1979 and 1987 the richest one fifth of society saw their share of total household income after taxes and cash benefits rise from 40 per cent. to 45 per cent. The poorest saw theirs fall from 6·1 per cent. to 5·1 per cent. For the first time since the second world war, the poorest half of the population have found that their share of total income is dropping."

The division between the richest and the poorest is now at its widest since 1886. Whatever Thatcherism may have done for the richest and most powerful in our society, it has done very little for the people whom I represent and for those whom my party primarily represents. It has done very little for those who need support or help. It has done very little for the poorest in our society. They are the people who are delighted to see the end of the right hon. Member for Finchley, and they are the people who will take some comfort from the cover of *Private Eye*, which I cannot show because we are not allowed to use visual aids, but which states:

> "'Rejoice, rejoice'—the lady has gone".

Opposition Members are rejoicing—not only for the poorest in our society, but for everyone in society. The quicker we now move to a Labour victory, the quicker we can do something to redress all the injustices of eleven and a half years of Thatcherism, and the better it will be for all of us.

12.29 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) not only on choosing this subject, but on the way in which he introduced his motion. He claimed only modest ambitions for himself, but he made an entertaining speech with effective and telling points on which I intend to elaborate later.

However, before I address the motion, I should like to say a few words about the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), who raised some important

points and spoke about them with great passion. I very much agree that we need more women in Parliament. As the hon. Lady correctly recognised, the working hours of Parliament are not the only obstacle to achieving that but I shall not elaborate on all the others because that would take up time that I should like to devote to other things. However, I very much share the hon. Lady's view and hope that more women from all parties will enter the House in future elections.

I am always keen for the House to work more effectively. The hon. Lady raised one interesting example when she said that we could save about £250,000 of taxpayers' money if we did not have quite so many late night sittings. One of the modest changes that we have made this Session is to reduce the number of questions to the Prime Minister that appear on the Order Paper which has, to my astonishment, had the devastating effect of saving £750,000 of taxpayers' money—just from that simple change. I hope that the hon. Lady will join me if I manage to find other ways in which we can save taxpayers' money which do not affect the effectiveness of the working of the House because I am trying to achieve the same objective.

I am willing to consider any proposals about changing our procedures. That is on my agenda, and I shall be considering not only how we should proceed but the way in which we should gather in various ideas about changing our working procedures. Although I shall not go into detail about those systems today, I should like to make three points that are relevant to the debate about hours.

First, as I have said, the Government are always endeavouring to have a more efficient House of Commons. However, it is often the Opposition or Back Benchers who seek to extend the number of hours that the House works each day. I make no complaint about that because it is one of the weapons that is available to an Opposition and to Back Benchers. However, as I said yesterday, we need the co-operation of all Members if we are to make any changes work and if those changes themselves are not to be exploited. Although times have moved on, we must remember what happened in 1967 as a result of the reforms and we must ensure that we do not end up with reforms that do not reduce but actually add to the working hours of the Chamber. I must stress that we need the co-operation of all hon. Members. I have looked at the report of the last Select Committee on Procedure that considered late-night sittings. The hon. Lady knows that that concluded that there was not a great deal to be done.

My second point follows on from the first and relates to trying to get statutory instruments considered upstairs in Committee and at different times of the day from when we normally consider them now, which is after 10 pm. That is a fruitful way of trying to reduce the number of late-night sittings. As the hon. Lady will know because this information was given in answer to one of her own questions, last Session we had fewer sittings after midnight than in the previous Session—60 compared with 77. I hope to continue to improve on that record. One way of doing that is to increase the number of statutory instruments that are considered elsewhere, as we are currently trying to do by setting up a number of European Community Standing Committees. I hope that the hon. Lady and her colleagues will support every action that we take to do that and that they will resist the temptation, which we discovered in others in the exchanges yesterday, of filling up with other things the time that is freed by considering statutory instruments elsewhere.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): It might be useful if the right hon. Gentleman looked at the report of the 1977-78 Select Committee on Procedure which, I believe, was the last report to produce some constructive ideas about how the House could sit more sensible hours.

Mr. MacGregor: I am prepared to look at all constructive ideas. But some ideas that look right in theory may not work in practice, unless we get the co-operation of hon. Members. That is why I put particular emphasis on the European Community Standing Committee point.

I am anxious to remove the myth—which I know the hon. Member for Peckham does not hold but which is held by some people outside the House when we talk about changing our working hours from 2.30 to, say, 9 to 5—that hon. Members do not start working until 2.30. We acknowledge that a large number of hon. Members—and Ministers, working in their Departments and elsewhere—start early in the morning and work through the morning.

Therein lies a problem facing many people who want to come to this place, and not only women. I refer not only to the hours in the House but to the increased burden on hon. Members, particularly those whose constituencies are well away from Westminster. The result is that the entire weekend is usually taken up working on parliamentary business as well as other matters. The pressures of the outside world and of new developments—not least the implications of European legislation and increasing demands from constituents, who increasingly look to their hon. Members for solutions to whatever problems they have—make our work load intensive. That should be on the record to reassure the outside world that we work in the mornings and to show that, even if we were able to change our hours in the Chamber, problems would still exist for women with families wishing to come here.

Ms. Harman: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Department of Employment and other Departments are encouraging a change in the pattern of employment, away from the traditional 40-plus hours a week. We are also witnessing a change in career structures, showing that the concept of getting ahead by doing more hours than everybody else is not sensible. The right hon. Gentleman has given examples of how we are not in control of our own destinies and of how, whatever hours we work, we shall still be overwhelmed.

The problem is that we have a male pattern of career advance with a pace being set with which women will never be able to compete. We need to be in control of our own destinies, to set our own hours and to do more sharing of work. Perhaps we need more Ministers and more delegated responsibilities in Departments, instead of having the inevitable empire-building and the person at the top saying, "I am absolutely overwhelmed. I must work 24 hours a day, seven days a week or I cannot do my job properly. Am I not marvellous?" It is time that we changed all that. May we have thinking from the right hon. Gentleman along a radical new direction?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to prolong that aspect of the debate, which is peripheral to the main debate today. I said that it is on my agenda to look at the whole

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question and that I am willing to hear any suggestions. I accept that there are more flexible working patterns to respond to the needs of modern society in most forms of employment. Looking particularly at the demographic downturn, it will be incumbent on most employers to become even more flexible if they are to get the work force they require.

But there is a difficulty in that context in considering the working patterns of hon. Members. We must consider not only the working arrangements that we apply to ourselves but the demands that are legitimately made on us by our constituents and others. If we could stop the flow of correspondence coming to us, we might make some difference, but that is not within our control.

Mr. Tony Banks: We do not often have the privilege on a Friday of the presence of the Leader of the House—we welcome him here—and of being able to put arguments to him. If he is prepared to look at those matters, will he, having referred to the flow of correspondence, consider the resources that are available to hon. Members?

It is a crazy system by which, despite our varying work loads, every hon. Member is given more or less the same resources. I am not trying to prove anything by working seven days a week. It seems that the harder I work, the more work I get and the harder I have to work. It is a treadmill and I would like to get off it. I look at my past and at photographs of myself. Seven years ago I had youthful, boyish features. Look at me now. Oh, it was a picture of Dorian Gray. If I had more resources, I might be able to cut down my hours and deal more efficiently with my work load.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will come and talk to me about that. He referred to me being here on a Friday, which is an interesting fact because I am here at the expense of cancelling many constituency engagements. I should now be visiting a school—I have had to cancel my visit to it three times because of parliamentary commitments. That illustrates the point.

I was congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and thanking him for the tribute he paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). I paid my tribute to my right hon. Friend in one of our recent debates, so I shall not repeat it. Today's debate gives us an opportunity to spell out the decade of revival and achievement in this country that we have seen under the leadership of my right hon. Friend.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), because I believe that when the history books are written they will undoubtedly record the years of the 1980s as ones of major recovery for our economy, with a new positive spirit towards Britain's economy at home, its role abroad and many other outstanding results. That record will be a permanent testimonial to a remarkable, and remarkably successful, Prime Minister.

Today we are looking back on the decade of the 1980s—that is what the motion is all about. In order fully to appreciate the change, it is important to compare this decade with the ending of the decade of the 1970s. The Labour party's outdated policies and mismanagement during its last period of government caused the decade of the 1970s to end with poor achievement in economic growth, certainly compared with our neighbours, massive early public overspending followed by massive cutbacks of public spending, together with continued huge borrowing, tax rates that were sometimes at 98p in the pound and were a huge disincentive to enterprise and initiative, constant interference in management, emphasis on state interference and control—we have seen some rekindling of that spirit and approach today—and capitulation to the Left.

We all recall the number of days lost and the damage done to British industry by the record number of strikes. We all recall the winter of industrial discontent. It is no wonder that, at the end of that decade, we were dubbed everywhere the sick man of Europe. I know that memories are short and that it would not be effective to recall the 1970s and the results of the Labour Government when the next election comes because times have moved on. But if we are to appreciate the measure of the achievement of the 1980s, it is important to start by reminding ourselves of the state of the country when we began that decade.

At the top of the list of political achievements in the 1980s, covering our first 11 years in power, is the turnround in our economic prospects. When we took office in 1979, the United Kingdom was at the bottom of the growth league, with the slowest growth rate in Europe. Between 1981 and 1989 we enjoyed eight successive years of sustained growth, averaging more than 3 per cent. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West simply cannot gainsay that. Together with Spain, the United Kingdom's economy has grown faster during the 1980s than those of all the other major European Community countries—faster than France and Germany. The reasons for using the starting date of 1981 is that, during our first two years of office, we had to deal with the overhang and all the difficulties left us in the economy.

Our economic growth is reflected in the big increase in living standards for the people of this country. A figure that is often quoted, but is worth repeating because it puts into context what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said, is that the average take-home pay in this country—that of a married man with two children on male average earnings—has increased by more than 30 per cent. in real terms during those 11 years.

Those are the bald figures, but aspirations, opportunities, and the ability to do all sorts of things that were not possible for previous generations—to have a better lifestyle and with greater fulfilment—have been realised for millions of our people. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) mentioned the increase in assets owned by many people, so I shall not repeat his figures. Only a Government with the political will to take the tough action needed to reverse years of decline could have achieved all that.

I grant that the rate of inflation is again too high, although it is low compared with what it was in the years of the last Labour Government. It is already clear beyond doubt that the same firmness of purpose that we have shown throughout these years is bearing fruit now. The tight policy stance of the past few years is already working. Whatever easy promises and false hopes are peddled by the Labour party, Conservatives have never pretended that it would be easy or painless to get inflation under control and keep it there. All the elements of our economic policy have their part to play: a tight monetary policy supported by a tough fiscal stance; unprecendented levels of

repayment of public sector debt; and firm control of public spending so that additional resources are provided in accordance with priorities.

The underlying strength of the economy derives from and is clear witness to the political wisdom and courage consistently shown by this Government since 1979. We are still showing it. Inflationary pressures are easing, as is clear from the monetary indicators. Above all, it is clear that, when there are signs of overheating in the economy and of rising inflationary pressures, it is this Government who take the prompt, effective and sometimes unpopular action to deal with them—in sharp contrast with the Labour party's record in government and its present policies.

Over the past four years debt repayment has topped £29 billion. In the current year debt repayment of £3 billion is expected, an unprecedented achievement which means that we are clearing up the debts of previous Governments instead of adding to the debt burden that will fall on our children. This will give us the strongest fiscal position of any G7 country apart from Japan.

Firm control of public spending underlines our commitment to the objectives for the medium term of a balanced budget. Since 1984-85 there has been the largest sustained fall for more than 30 years in the ratio of public spending to national income—a fall of more than 7 per cent. Controlling public spending is essential for sound economic management. That is a lesson that the Labour party never learns, and it is emerging clearly from the way in which they approach policy now that the Opposition still have not learnt it. It is certainly one of the factors that has made possible our economic growth and enabled us to put a great many additional resources into key priority areas and to make substantial changes in tax rates over the past 11 years. Increased economic growth, responsible economic stewardship and proper attention to priorities have enabled us to increase resources in many crucial public spending areas, some of which I want to mention to eradicate the impression given in some Opposition Members' speeches this morning.

In the past 11 years we have done more than has ever been done before to protect the most vulnerable groups in society. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) tried to give the impression that we had not devoted enough resources to social security. Total expenditure on social security is up by 36 per cent. in real terms. Average pensioners' real net income——

Mrs. Ray Michie: What about employment?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall come to that in a moment.

Average pensioners' real net income is up by more than 30 per cent. and the incomes of pensioners who depend on social security benefits have risen by 27 per cent. in real terms, compared with by 6 per cent. under the Labour Government. Support for people in residential care and nursing homes—they are mostly pensioners—has trebled in real terms, per head, since 1979.

The figures speak for themselves. We are spending more than £1·1 billion in 1989-90, compared with only £20 million in 1979. Since the 1988 social security reforms, we have devoted another £350 million a year, in real terms, to help low-income families with children. Family credit for working families has become more generous, and more families are being helped.

One factor that particularly delights me is that expenditure on benefits for the long-term sick has doubled in real terms since 1979 with many more benefits being introduced and many more people helped. It is not just a question of extra resources because we have increased the incentive to work for pensioners and families on low incomes. More than 70 per cent. of newly retired pensioners have occupational pension schemes, and in many ways greater choice is available to many pensioners.

Such matters give the lie to the Opposition charge that we have not concentrated resources on those who are most in need. We have been able to do that because of the success of our economic policies. The ability to put more public money where it is needed without prejudice to our firm control of the economy demonstrates another political achievement of our economic record. No longer is the long-term health of our country's economy put at risk by short-term political expediency.

All over Britain people and businesses have responded positively to our lead. I shall give some important figures to demonstrate the success of the 1980s. In the three years to 1989 business investment increased by 45 per cent., the largest three-year increase since the war. United Kingdom investment growth in the 1980s was higher than that of any other European Community country except Spain. Total non-residential investment as a share of GDP puts us near the top of the league table of major industrialised countries.

The profitability of industrial and commercial companies last year and the year before was the highest since 1973. The same was true for manufacturing companies, where profitability was over three times the figure at the start of the decade. The rate at which new businesses start up continues dramatically to outstrip business closures, by 1,700 a week in 1989. Why have we had this decade of achievement and success in the business and commercial sector? It is partly because of the setting of the right economic climate and partly because we have set managers free to do what they do best, which is to manage. That is why we have seen a net increase in new businesses of 400,000 since 1979 and why 1·5 million more people are now self-employed. Employment is now at its highest ever level, having increased by 3·75 million since 1983. That rise is greater than the rise in any other European country. Therefore, it is not true to say that we have a higher rate of unemployment than any other European country because our rate is well below the Community average.

Privatisation and wider ownership have helped to foster this sea change in attitudes. The runaway success of the privatisation programme will surely stand out in decades to come as one of the significant political achievements of the 1980s. The very term "privatisation" was coined to make clear the complete break with the failed and discredited policy of nationalisation. It is a backhanded but none the less welcome tribute to our success that the Opposition are now so embarrassed by what remains of their commitment to the renationalisation of privatised industries that they have not committed themselves to such renationalisation. This debate shows that there is a great debate in the Opposition about that matter. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West clearly indicated that he would like to see massive renationalisation and claimed that, although he was not quite in splendid isolation, his was very much a minority view in his party. I do not think that that is true. I think that he was revealing the true spirit

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and attitude of the Opposition. It is important for the country to note that that indicates what the Opposition would do if they were returned to power.

Some 11 million people—one in four of the adult population—now own shares. Many of them have shares in only one or two companies, but at the start of a great new approach for many people who have never contemplated being part of a wider share-owning democracy it is inevitable that they should start by investing in only one or two companies. Significantly, the number of share owners has tripled in the past 11 years. By any standard, that is a massive broadening of the only sort of public ownership of the means of production which has any real virtue and which carries any weight in a modern, internationally competitive economy. That lesson, it is significant to note, is being learnt painfully but eagerly by all the countries of eastern Europe as they emerge from the long dark nights of socialism.

We are proud of the spread of ownership not just in shares but in owner-occupation—now two thirds of the population. I hope that we shall see it spread a good deal further. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon made some interesting points about the new mortgage schemes in Basildon. There is also the spread of ownership to having one's own pension—not just occupational pensions. I have already said that 77 per cent. of new pensioners already have an occupational pension, and there are also personal pensions. The growth of self-employment and small businesses is another factor in the same vein.

All these factors are extending personal ownership and personal responsibility. They are doing something else to which my hon. Friend referred. The decade of the 1980s will go down as a time of great social mobility. I have much pride in that. I came into politics and the Conservative party with a firm belief in spreading widely ownership, personal responsibility and personal wealth and assets.

I noted what my hon. Friend said about his background in Newham. I come from a coal-mining village in Scotland where nearly everyone—at that time and, to a large extent, still—was housed in municipal dwellings. Few had the aspirations that so many hold now. My awareness of the fact that only the most enterprising were breaking away, and my deep desire to see taking place there what was happening in other parts of the country, with a greater spread of owner-occupation, leading to a more attractive environment for individuals and their families, gave me my conviction about the importance of the spread of ownership.

One of the most commendable events about the 1980s is that we have been able to achieve that spread of ownership but also to have much greater social mobility, and much greater classlessness, because that is what follows from it. The modern Tory party is a good example of a party to which anyone can aspire. We are drawing people from all classes, races and backgrounds in increasing numbers. One of the great achievements of the 1980s is that class warfare and attitudes are now a thing of the past.

Mr. Amess: Does my right hon. Friend share my pleasure at the announcement that has just come from the Palace stating that the Queen has appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) as a member of the Order of Merit? Is that not a fitting tribute to so courageous a lady?

Mr. Tony Banks: What about Denis?

Mr. MacGregor: I have only just been handed the press notice. I am sure that the House will share our pleasure about the announcement. The hon. Member for Peckham spoke of families. We have enormously admired the part that Denis Thatcher played in the past decade. He has been paid a fitting tribute, and I shall read out the press notice:

"The Queen has been pleased to approve that the dignity of a Baronetcy of the United Kingdom be conferred upon Denis Thatcher".

We have also carried out industrial relations reforms to ensure that unions remain firmly under the control of their members. We now have a legal framework for industrial relations that ensures that the disgraceful scenes that we witnessed in the dark, dying days of the last Labour Government should never be repeated. The number of stoppages is the lowest for over half a century and the number of days lost because of strikes is a fifth of the average of the 1970s. These bare statistics represent another of our major political achievements.

To hear the criticisms of our achievements in the last decade voiced by the Labour party, one would think that our encouragement of freedom of choice was meant as a substitute for extra resources from the public purse. I have already shown what nonsense that is on our social policies and it is equally true of our health policy. Next year, £32 billion will be spent on the NHS. That is 50 per cent. more in real terms than the Labour Government spent in the last year of office. I do not have time to show all the ways in which these resources are used in the NHS, but they include reductions in the waiting lists, the big increase in the number of patients treated, the extra number of new hospitals, of doctors and of nurses. One of the great achievements of the past decade was the massive priority given to the national health service.

The same is true of education and training. As a former Secretary of State for Education and Science, I should have liked to spend more time on the subject, but I wish to allow other hon. Members to contribute to the debate. Moreover, there has been a revolution in training. British companies, encouraged by the Government and the training and enterprise councils that we have set up, are devoting £20 billion a year to training. That is a big improvement on the achievements of past years. Spending per pupil in schools has increased by 40 per cent. in real terms during the last decade. Moreover, freedom of choice for parents has increased as a result of our reforms. The reform of the GCSE, the technical and vocational education initiative and the national curriculum have led to ever-increasing standards and to many more young people staying on voluntarily at school after 16. They are obtaining ever better grades in GCSE and A-levels. Above all, there has been a massive explosion in the number of young people entering higher education. That is a major investment for the future. It means also that the educational aspirations of many more young people are being fulfilled.

For reasons of time there are many other areas that I shall be unable to cover while talking about the past decade, but much of what I have said can be summed up in the phrase "power to the people". My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon referred to personal responsibility

and decision-taking. We are talking about the power to choose medical treatment through the NHS reforms, the power to choose schools, the power to choose how to spend more and more of our individual incomes instead of having the state spend it for us. We are also talking about the power that we have given to people to own their own homes or to take a stake in the company for which they work. We have provided the power to ensure that unions follow the wishes of their moderate members. We have also provided the power, which more and more people are exercising as the seeds of the enterprise culture take root and flower, to start their own businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon briefly referred to what has happened during the last decade in terms of foreign affairs and defence and to the role of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley. I should have dearly liked to go into that subject in greater depth. Recent debates, however, have provided us with the opportunity to deal with those issues. I shall therefore refrain, except to say that I do not believe that the foreign affairs achievements that we have witnessed, the developments in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, or the end of the cold war would have come about were it not for the determination of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley during the early years of the last decade to maintain our defences—in particular, to deploy cruise and Pershing missiles—and yet at the same time to be one of the first to start a real dialogue with President Gorbachev.

That, and everything else to which I have referred, is in marked contrast to the approach of the last Labour Government. Moreover, I believe that we shall find that it is in marked contrast to the policies that the Labour party is developing. I should have liked to spend a few moments on that subject, but I shall refrain from doing so in order that other hon. Members can speak in the debate.

We are beginning to see—we have already seen it this week in the Labour party's policy documents on health and education—that the Labour party has not learnt anything from what happened in the 1970s and the successes of the 1980s.

The two Labour party documents that have been published this week are notable for three characteristics. First, the Labour party rejects so many of the policies that have increased choice, freedom and competition within the state services. I refer to increased choice for individuals —for example, increased choice for parents in education, a choice that is becoming increasingly popular. Secondly, the Labour party would set up more quangos. Indeed, quango, quango, quango is a feature of the Labour party's two policy documents. Thirdly, the Labour party is making promises, promises, promises without suggesting how it intends to raise the finance to undertake those spending promises. The Opposition have been careful to avoid any reference to actual figures. Nevertheless, they are very free with their pledges.

Mr. Grocott: They are specific and narrow.

Mr. McGregor: The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that. I have counted up the number of new commitments. The Labour party will make exactly the same mistakes as it made last time.

Above all, the decade of the 1980s has been one not only of great positive achievements but of the extension of opportunity and choice to so many people in this country. Only this party and this Government will be able to carry that on in the 1990s.

1.4 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): It would be difficult to think of a motion quite as wide-ranging as this one. Despite its wide-ranging nature, one or two hon. Members have strayed beyond it. I shall deal with the one who strayed further than any of the others—my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). I am glad that she managed to remain in order because she made several extremely important points about the conditions in this place—points with which I strongly agree—and I am pleased that the Leader of the House agrees with many of them as well.

It is in my nature that I should want to be a little more radical in the proposals. My hon. Friend did not deal adequately enough with the problems experienced by hon. Members away from London. I see no earthly reason why it should not be possible for some debates to be held away from London. I cannot see why this debate needs to be located in this building in the centre of London. Why can it not be held in the regions? We shall no doubt be told that civil service need to attend, that it would cause great expense, and so on, but there are not that many civil servants here today and massive briefing is not necessary for debates of this kind. We must try to be a little less London-based and to move out into the regions. However, that is getting dangerously out of order, so I shall revert to the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

I have rarely known a more wide-ranging subject. Having participated only occasionally in a debate such as this, I assume that there must be a clear injunction from Central Office to Tories tabling motions enjoining them to keep off the specific—in other words, "Whatever you do, do not mention specifically what is happening in your constituency; do not mention mortgage rates, the poll tax, hospital waiting lists, crumbling schools or any of the other specific things that are happening in your constituency; keep it very general."

Mr. Wilshire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: I will give way later.

The original motion tabled by the hon. Member for Basildon was simply

"To call attention to United Kingdom political developments since 1979."

The hon. Gentleman elaborated on that a little and, so far as I could make out, gave a eulogy or Thatcher memorial lecture. The wording of the motion, as it later developed, basically says that the former Prime Minister liberated eastern Europe, could wrestle tigers and did sundry other things in the past 11 years. That is not true—I can speak with a certain authority on this—and I am delighted to have seen the end of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) as Prime Minister. In saying that, I speak on behalf of a clear majority in the House. It is rare for an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to be able to claim with authority that he or she is speaking on behalf of the majority in the House, but in saying how delighted I am to see the back of the former Prime Minister, I speak on behalf of my 226 colleagues, the 168 Conservative Members who voted against her or abstained and, say, about 20 Liberals and other parties. More than 400

[Mr. Grocott]

Members are delighted to see the back of the right hon. Lady, and it is a sound and shrewd judgment. In summary of the Thatcher years, the right hon. Member for Finchley has been merely the figurehead of Thatcherism—a mean-minded philosophy, based on greed and selfishness, which has no moral authority.

During the debate, no grand idea has been put forward by a Conservative Member. Specifics have been mentioned, but there has been no attempt to give the Conservative Government an overall moral justification. I do not have the slightest doubt that when the history books are written, the 1980s will be seen as the shabby years that they were, when so much was wrong in this country. I intend to refer to the specifics of what went wrong and to the demise of the right hon. Member for Finchley. I know that Conservative Members are not too keen on going into details about that, but I see it as part of my duty to do so.

I wish to examine briefly the specifics of the Thatcher years. Let us consider the gap between rich and poor, which has expanded in the past eleven and a half years. Let us consider the growth in homelessness. In the past full year, 120,000 households have been accepted as homeless. That is double the number in 1979. There were 14,390 evictions in the first six months of this year. That is the measure of the gap between rich and poor.

Let us consider the massive unemployment. Such things do not seem to touch the lives of Conservative Members, although even on the Government's official, fiddled figures, unemployment went above 3 million during the 1980s. Let us consider the despair of school leavers. There is no opportunity for thousands of our school leavers to go into a job of which they can be proud and the chances of obtaining an apprenticeship are slim.

There have been attacks on our civil liberties in the past 11 years, of which the most classic and brutal was the denial of trade union rights at the Government communications headquarters in Cheltenham. A shabby bribe was offered to ensure that trade union rights were given up.

Apart from specific attacks on civil liberties, there has been constant denigration of the broadcasting media. I speak with some feeling as a member of the National Union of Journalists and of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians. Threats came repeatedly from the then chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). There were disgraceful scenes at this year's Conservative party conference when the BBC in particular, which is admired throughout the world and in this country, as all opinion polls show, was attacked by the deeply unrepresentative activists in the Tory party.

I fear what would happen to the broadcasting system if the Government were re-elected. They have already done a great deal of damage through the Broadcasting Act 1990. Central Independent television in my own region announced almost 500 redundancies last week as a direct and predictable result of the Broadcasting Act. That important part of our national life is being damaged under this Government.

What has happened in the past 11 years to law and order—the Tories' own fighting ground? I always take the precaution of bringing copies of Tory manifestos to debates such as this. It is worth looking at their manifesto commitments on law and order, of which they are usually so proud. The 1979 manifesto contained a proud section called "The Fight Against Crime", in which the Tories said how dreadful it was that the crime rate was going up. In the 1983 election manifesto, the Tories tended to duck the subject because of the failures, and the section was entitled:

"Law, Democracy and the Citizen".

By 1987—it took them a long time to get to this stage—the Tories were saying:

"We do not underrate the challenge. Crime has been rising steadily over the years . . . The origins of crime lie deep in society".

One does not often see such profound sentiments in a Tory manifesto. The manifesto continued:

"Government alone cannot tackle such deep-rooted problems easily or quickly."

Crime rates have rocketed on all fronts under this Government and we now have the highest prison population in western Europe. That is another area of shame in the 11 years of the Conservative Administration.

I must take advantage of the presence of the Leader of the House, who was formerly Secretary of State for Education and Science, to say something about education. The right hon. Gentleman talks about choice in education. He did not give parents in my constituency much choice when, against all advice and in the face of much pleading, he insisted on establishing a city technology college at a cost to the taxpayer of £8·5 million, which is more than the expenditure on all the other schools in the county put together. Did that give parents choice or create a level playing field? As has happened so often—notably on the Health Service—the Government took no notice of representations from teachers, parents, pupils, churches and local authorities, including one Conservative-controlled authority. The right hon. Gentleman officially admits to having received 91 direct representations from my constituents when he was Secretary of State. Some 85 of those representations argued against the establishment of a CTC. What did the Secretary of State do? He established a CTC. There was not much consultation or choice in that case.

The same is true of the health service. The Government have passed legislation for which they have no mandate. It was not mentioned in the last Tory manifesto. The Government have forced the legislation through and now hospitals are opting out against the expressed wishes of those living in the communities that they serve. Where is the choice in that? What is all this nonsense about freedom of choice?

I am not surprised that the Leader of the House talked so much about the economy. Some misguided people may say, "I know that the Tories don't care much and they are not much good on social issues, but perhaps one has to be a bit rough and tough to succeed in economic terms." Even on the Government's own definition of success, they have been abject failures. I am amazed that Conservative Members should have mentioned taxation. For the average couple with two children, the tax burden as a proportion of gross income has increased under this Government. When the Conservatives came to power, our inflation rate stood at about the European average. It is now twice the European average. The Government must learn to live with statistics like those.

I shall speak rather more passionately about the effect of the Government's policies on manufacturing industry and engineering in the west midlands.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: According to column *206* of yesterday's *Hansard*, taking account of taxation and child benefit, the average family is £58 a week better off under this Government, compared with an increase of less than £1·40 under the Labour Government. That may not be altogether inconsistent with what the hon. Gentleman says but it tells rather a different story.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman should check the figures. He will discover that, in 1979, 35·2 per cent. of gross weekly income was spent in taxation. The figure is now 36·6 per cent. That is no great surprise. One cannot double VAT a day or two after coming into office and claim to be reducing the burden of taxation. That is one of the myths that the Government have managed to create.

I have lived all my adult life in the west midlands—Britain's engineering heartland. In 1979, there were 613,000 manufacturing jobs in the west midlands. There are now 385,000. It is almost impossible to secure an engineering apprenticeship. Yet the Government wonder why, when there is an economic upturn, foreign engineering products and manufactured goods are sucked in. That is inevitable. Who would have thought it possible—given that the Government came to power with a huge international trade surplus—that by 1983 Britain, the workshop of the world, would turn around to such an extent that we now have a deficit of £16 billion in manufactured trade. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members representing southern constituencies may find that amusing. If the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) represented a constituency in the west midlands, she would not find it funny.

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that as societies and their economies advance, they move from practical manufacturing industries into more financially based industries. We have done that and Britain is the European Community leader in financial services. Japan and America are moving in the same direction. Measuring manufacturing industry as a sign of prosperity is old-fashioned and out-of-date economics.

Mr. Grocott: I am sorry that the hon. Lady believes that priceless engineering skills are old-fashioned and out of date. That is one of many views which place her in a minority in the House and in the country.

All the dreadful things that have happened in the past 11 years might be understandable if we had been uniquely disadvantaged or if something dreadful had happened with which we had had to cope and therefore had to make sacrifices. But the reverse is the case. Not surprisingly, the Leader of the House did not mention oil revenues in his catalogue of the economy over the past 11 years. How different the world would have been if the last Labour Government had had the oil revenues and the present Tory Government had not. I recall the year 1979 with particular vividness. In my judgment, the electors of Lichfield and Tamworth made a particularly silly decision that year and I lost my seat. The economic and political literature in 1979 agreed that because of the predictable oil revenues that were growing year by year, whatever party won the 1979 general election would in all probability win the next one and the one after that. There is no magic about what happened in electoral terms during the 1980s. The Government were saved by oil revenues. Quite disastrously and disgracefully, they have also been saved by revenues from privatisation. In those immortal words, they sold the family silver. There is nothing very clever about that. The 1980s were undoubtedly unique years because assets can be sold only once and, tragically, so many of our assets have been sold at knock-down prices.

Those are the legacies of 11 years of Thatcherism. I am sure that if Conservative Members reflect on them, they will be ashamed. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has gone. The policies have not been changed, but I am pleased that she has gone. I want to reflect on some of the circumstances surrounding her departure which may be rather uncomfortable for some Conservative Members, although I dare say that most of those present today supported the former Prime Minister in the election.

Undoubtedly the past few weeks have been unique in history. As we live through such periods, we often do not see what has happened in perspective. What has happened over the past three weeks—an incredibly short period of time—is without historical precedent. A Prime Minister in peacetime, with a large majority in the House and with at least 18 months before it was necessary to call a general election, has been thrown out.

I checked the dates before the debate. On 13 November the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) made his devastating speech in the House. On 15 November nominations were made for the two leadership candidates. On 22 November the former Prime Minister said that she would resign and by 28 November we had a new Prime Minister. Other Prime Ministers were keen to continue—we are all aware that both Churchill and Macmillan wanted to carry on—but there has never been such a devastating and public rejection of a Prime Minister by her own party.

That revealed a little about the Prime Minister. We hear a great deal about her courage—there is a lot about her courage in the motion. To use her language—I am sure I shall not offend her by using it as she has often used it against us—we discovered that she was frit. She did not have to quit. She could have stayed on for the second ballot. She had the choice to carry on. Some people think that she might have won if she had stayed on for the second ballot. At least she had that option. There is something else that she could have done, but she would have been even more frit of that—she could have called a general election. She could have told the Queen that things had happened beyond her control and recommended that we let the country judge whether she should continue. Clearly, she was even more frit of the electorate than of her own party.

Of course, it all goes back to the good luck of the oil revenue. I have long suspected it of the former Prime Minister, and she has proved it at last. We have heard so much about her guts and courage, but it is dead easy to lead a political party when things are going well. It is incredibly tough to lead a political party when times are bad. As soon as she had a sustained period of difficulty, she went. We shall all be able to judge that in future.

Mr. Wilshire: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's definition of toughness. Does he accept that the toughest thing of all for any politician of whatever political persuasion is to put the future of the country and of one's

[Mr. Wilshire]

party before one's own career? That is exactly what happened. That proves that my right hon. Friend was tougher than the hon. Gentleman will ever be.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman shows the common confusion among Thatcherites, which is the inability to distinguish between the good of the country and the good of his party.

Why did she leave? Journalists—with all due respect to all my old friends in the National Union of Journalists—have got it horribly wrong. Did she leave because of the attack by her former deputy Prime Minister? Of course not. Did she leave because of splits in the Tory party over Europe? Of course there are splits in the Tory party over Europe, but that has nothing to do with the reason why she left. Did she leave because of the breakdown of Cabinet Government? There is not the slightest doubt that there was a breakdown in Cabinet Government—we have more than enough evidence of that—but that was not the reason why she left. She left because she was being beaten by the Labour party. *[Laughter.]*

I will wipe the smiles off Conservative Members' faces with one simple question—and I will give way to any one of them who can answer it. Four weeks ago today, in the small hours of the morning, the result of the Bradford by-election was declared. Does any Conservative Member seriously doubt that if the Tory party had won the Bradford by-election, or even if it had come a good second instead of an abysmal third the former Prime Minister would not still be the Prime Minister? Of course she would. She was thrown out because the Tories saw exactly what was happening to their party. They were being trounced at every test of electoral opinion in the past 18 months, through a series of disastrous by-election results, local election results and the European election. With clinical precision the Tories realised that they had had it. It was because of our success that she went, not because of a cabal of Tory Members.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that if Bradford had gone the other way that may not have happened, but it is worth remembering that Bradford became Conservative because of a split in the Labour party. When Ben Ford stood, the Labour vote was split. We do not regard it as a completely Conservative seat. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to believe that all that was inevitable.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), having seen the results of the first ballot, decided that the wounds could heal if she stepped aside. They have healed, and the Labour party is trying to face the problem that it was some way ahead at some stage but is now some way behind. Its leader is less popular with the electorate than the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is. The Labour party cannot change its leader. The hon. Gentleman's remarks explain how the Labour party will lose the next election because it is stuck with its leader.

Mr. Grocott: If the hon. Gentleman believes the polls of the last two or three weeks and really believes that we are behind, there is a good solution—he can beg the new Prime Minister for a general election. That is the way to test things, and we would love it. Let us test that belief in a real poll as soon as possible. That is the way to deal with it.

We all know perfectly well that, over a long and sustained period, the Conservative party has been doing disastrously in election after election. I am sorry that the former chairman of the Conservative party is not in his place today because I have debated this with him once or twice before. His must have been the most monumentally unsuccessful period as chairman of the Conservative party because, during his 14 months in office, he lost nine by-elections, numerous local elections and a Prime Minister. That is not bad going for a short period in office. When the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Education and Science, he was tremendously fond of testing and checking by results and performance. He must be profoundly relieved that those rules do not apply in the Cabinet. He has been promoted, which is what Tories do with failures. Promoting by results is an old Tory doctrine that they apply to every but themselves.

I shall dwell a little longer on the Tory party's electoral process when picking their new leader because it revealed a great deal about the mystical workings of that old political party, which none of us had seen revealed before. The first thing that it showed us was the peculiar position held by the chairman of the party. We are often told that the Tories taught eastern Europe about democracy. Almost any political party in eastern Europe or anywhere else would be staggered by a system in which the chairman of a political party was appointed by the leader of that party and, during the election for the leadership of the party, actively campaigned for one of the two candidates. That is an astonishing electoral system if ever I saw one.

The role of the returning officer is also worth a word. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is more of an expert on Tory mechanics because he stood outside the Committee Room for most of the time, but as I understand it, the returning officer is the chairman of the Back-Bench 1922 committee. Not only did the right hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) say right at the beginning that he did not think that there should be any election—an odd position for a returning officer—but when one of the candidates won, he appeared to have an emotional breakdown. That is not the neutrality that one expects from a returning officer.

Mr. Skinner: Not only is what my hon. Friend has said about the chairman of the 1922 committee true—the chairmanship of that Back-Bench committee is another of the curious appointments in the Tory party—but when the Tories had the first ballot I did the exit poll and was only three out because I forecast 149. When the result was 152 for Gary Glitter, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—the right hon. Member for Woking was so upset that he took the ballot box into another Committee Room. Has my hon. Friend ever heard of any returning officer in any election not being prepared to face the electorate? The right hon. Gentleman dragged the ballot box from Committee Room 12 to Committee Room 14. All the Tory Members were asking, "What's the result?", and the journalists, the Labour Members and all the rest got to know first. Every Custodian in the House knew the result before the Tory party electorate did. Amazingly, those 372 people turned up for work on two successive Tuesdays just to vote.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend has a duty to the House to prepare a report on what he knows.

Mr. Skinner: I am doing that—it will be a pamphlet.

Mr. Grocott: Seeing what my hon. Friend made of the Tory electoral process would make extremely interesting reading.

That electoral process revealed something a little more sinister about the Tory party and its operations. I refer hon. Members who have not seen it to a little article in last week's *Observer*, which may not be much loved by Conservative Members, but which referred to those hon. Members who had supported the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). What sort of party can it be in a democracy when only about 20 of the 152 Conservative Members who voted for the right hon. Gentleman had the nerve to admit that they voted for him? What sort of Stalinism is that in a so-called democratic political party?

We know that the hon. Member who challenged the former Prime Minister last year has been deselected by his constituency party. What will happen to the supporters of the right hon. Member for Henley this year? All are being threatened with deselection in one form or another, and one of them—quoted anonymously in the article to which I referred, and we appreciate why he had to remain anonymous—said:

"What I cannot forgive and what I cannot easily convey is the viciousness of the reaction to Michael's challenge."

Conservative Members know what is going on in their constituencies. I was amused to hear the hon. Member for Basildon proudly proclaim that he voted for the former Prime Minister in the first ballot and for the present Prime Minister in the second—what political courage!

Mr. Wilshire: I would have thought that, as a journalist, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) would have known better than to be totally selective in quoting from newspaper articles. Had he chosen any other newspaper and counted up the number of hon. Members who declared for all three candidates he would have discovered that, far from there being only 20 in the context to which he referred, the Conservative party in the House apparently numbered about 745.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman trivialises a serious issue.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) did not make his position clear in my exit poll.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover reports that the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) did not even declare his position to the exit pollster.

Mr. Wilshire: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) to misrepresent me in that way? I made it absolutely clear as I came out of the room on each occasion—and to the newspapers—that on the first ballot I voted for my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and on the second for the current Prime Minister.

Mr. Grocott: Another courageous knight has declared himself. Clearly, Conservative Members were stunned when the right hon. Member for Finchley resigned. It was no accident, and it is not difficult to explain, why the present Prime Minister won the ballot. His election was utterly predictable. To begin with, he had the block vote of the hard Right. We hear much about factions and groups in the Labour party. One well-organised group in the Conservative party—we have seen it in operation repeatedly—is the hard Right. Imagine what would have happened if the right hon. Member for Chingford had stood as a candidate, as I understand that it was thought repeatedly that he might.

Mr. Skinner: There was a meeting in the Tea Room when that issue was discussed.

Mr. Grocott: I am obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, whose information is tremendous. Who knows how many votes the right hon. Member for Chingford would have secured? The 50 or 60 votes that would have gone to him were clearly delivered en masse to the present Prime Minister. That is indicative of the way in which the Conservative party operates.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Grocott: I have been generous in giving way, but I must now get on.

Another reason why the present Prime Minister was bound to be elected leader was that the constituency pressure became overwhelming when it became known that the former Prime Minister had declared him as her appointed successor. It was the Tory party's way of expunging its guilt and saying, "Sorry, Margaret." That is why, almost from nowhere, the present Prime Minister took over. He is still blinking in the sunlight. He cannot quite believe what has happened to him.

That is the history of the last three weeks. It needs fleshing out, but Conservative Members have shown their almost awesome ruthlessness in detecting a massive electoral disadvantage, cleansing the party as rapidly as possible and then allegedly closing ranks, although they will find great difficulty when the witch hunts begin in the constituencies. I look forward to articles appearing in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express* about tightly knit groups of politically motivated people usurping democracy in constituency parties. That is the kind of article with which we are well familiar and which will no doubt be appearing in due course.

We have seen Conservative Members ditch a Prime Minister. Now they have a final job on their hands, which is to start ditching some of their policies if they are to have any chance of winning the next election. Foremost on that agenda—the cheek that they have shown in this respect is awesome—is to find a way of getting out of the fiasco of the poll tax. Having spent the past three and a half years telling us what a marvellous system it was and voting down every amendment that we suggested to try to mitigate it, they have the presumption to come to us now and say, "Please help us out, we do not know what to do about this. We are facing disaster, please give us a hand." They act as though the poll tax were a marginal aspect of Tory policy, but it was central to their last general election manifesto. Hon. Members should re-read that document—I always have copies of it with me. It states:

"We will reform local government finance to strengthen local democracy and accountability . . . We will legislate in the first Session of the new Parliament to abolish the unfair domestic rating system and replace rates with a fairer Community Charge."

The poll tax was central to the Conservative election manifesto and dominated parliamentary time for three years. I should imagine that it has taken up the time of all the civil servants in Marsham street as they try to make sense of a nonsensical proposition. It dominated every local authority up and down the country. My own local

[Mr. Grocott]

authority, The Wrekin, is also wrestling with the problems that it involves. The cost of collecting it in my own constituency is £1·25 million—two and a half times the cost of collecting the rates. It is massively more difficult to collect the poll tax and authorities have to borrow far more money at inflated rates of interest to sustain themselves through the political year.

The poll tax was no marginal policy commitment by the Tory party. It was a failed experiment on a massive scale. It came about because the Government would not listen, but had the arrogance of power. It would be bad enough if the poll tax were an isolated example, but it is not—it is symptomatic of Thatcherism in all sectors of policy. The Government had the arrogance of power, with contempt for opposition and for the weak. We are delighted that the decade of Thatcherism under their former leader has ended and we shall be delighted when the people of this country have the chance to get rid of the current Prime Minister in a general election.

1.42 pm

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I certainly do not want to follow the example of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) because much of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) covered the essence of reasons that lie behind his tabling of the motion. I am glad to be able to speak on the motion, and to do so more briefly than the hon. Member for The Wrekin, to place on record my profound respect and regard for my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), because of not just her policies and the success of the Conservative Government during the past 10 years, but the personal consideration she gives to her colleagues in the House, a point which is often overlooked by those who do not know her. When I had to retire from the Government as a result of injury, I appreciated her consideration. I suspect that other hon. Members can recall many similar incidents.

Today's Order Paper includes a motion that I tabled regarding the initiatives of my right hon. Friend the present Prime Minister on the reduction of the debt burden of the poorest countries, which I am sure we shall not reach today. I do not want to stray out of order by speaking to it more than in passing because I realise that other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, and it is only right that they should do so.

It is not without significance that it was under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley that the former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), and the present Prime Minister put forward initiatives of major importance that led the thinking in the international financial community, the International Monetary Fund and the Paris club on how to relieve the appalling burden of debt on the sub-Saharan African and other countries that do not have natural resources in abundance and have been crippled by not only the accumulation of debt, but the considerable effect of cumulatively high levels of interest on dollar borrowings.

It was a measure of the realism of the Conservative Government in the 1980s and of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Chancellors that it was this country that took the initiative in putting forward practical proposals for recognising all this. It exemplifies an important part of the contribution that my right hon. Friend made during her time as Prime Minister. She injected realism into the consideration of domestic and international political affairs.

For instance, my right hon. Friend tackled economic problems realistically. It was she who realised that large budget deficits and uncontrolled public expenditure would cause growing economic problems in this and other countries. She it was who encouraged Chancellors of the Exchequer to bring our budget back into balance over time and to acknowledge that an economy performs more successfully when tax rates are lower—and that the yield from personal taxation rises when those rates are lower.

That is a lesson that no one believed 10 or 12 years ago, but it has been proved in this country. As a Treasury Minister I was only too aware that most people did not believe that what we said would come about. But when we reduced tax rates we found an improved energy, efficiency and enterprise in the economy that led to higher yields, which enabled us to devote more public expenditure to essential services. At the same time, they enabled us to lower the tax burden on private individuals to finance that public expenditure.

The realism of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was very important for many years in the European Community. Records of the past few weeks have greatly distorted the part played by my right hon. Friend in the evolution of the Community. The summit that discussed the prospects for economic and monetary union showed the Community at its worst. Proposals were brought forward which had not been thought out and Heads of Government were asked to make commitments to ideas that had not been properly explained to them.

Once again my right hon. Friend had the courage—she was the only one who had—to explain that this was no way to take the European Community forward successfully. I vividly recall my personal experience of what happened in the mid-1980s. I had the fortune, or misfortune, to be the Treasury Minister representing the United Kingdom at the Budget Council of the European Community during the critical years leading up to and immediately after the Fountainebleau agreement on budgetary restitution to this country.

At the time the Prime Minister had been arguing powerfully for several years that unless the major imbalance of contributions from which we were suffering was put right, it would serve to undermine the future of the Community. We had a direct national interest in the matter, but it was also in the Community's interest to put it right, because while it hung over us progress could not be made on other matters. It was only my right hon. Friend's persistence and determination which led to an agreement which saved us many billions of pounds in contributions to the Community and which removed from the agenda a running sore that was doing terrible damage to the development of the European Community, to which we belonged and which we hoped would be successful.

My right hon. Friend—I remember many all-night sessions in Brussels when I was personally involved in the consequences of this—pointed out that the common agricultural policy was almost bound, in its then form, to lead to explosive demands on the European Community budget—demands which could not be met from member states' contributions. She also said that it would distort agricultural markets not only in the world but in the

Community and that that would destabilise world trade and ultimately lead to the sort of problems that are now being faced in the GATT round. In her recognition of that, my right hon. Friend was years ahead of other Government leaders and she started to campaign for changes which have gradually been introduced, although they have not yet gone far enough.

We should listen to my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley when she talks about constitutional aspects of the Community and the problems of monetary union, a subject that has had much attention in the House recently, and I do not propose to speak about it in detail. However, I should like to make one point. It is easy to draw attention to the obvious arguments about sovereignty. Essentially, it is a political and constitutional matter which comes readily to the mind of professional politicians. However, there is a much more difficult and important issue in the near term, namely, the practical possibilities and implications of economic and monetary union. They have attracted rather less attention in public debate, but it is vital for them to be given more prominence from now on. I hope that at the intergovernmental conferences the Government will do all that they can to draw attention to the fact that one of our major worries, in addition to the one about sovereignty, is that the Community should not embark on a road that is likely to lead to its destruction.

I am far from being an uncritical supporter of the Community, but it is in the interests of all its nations to belong to it and to see it become successful and move forward. Nothing is more likely to undermine it or cause it to split apart than monetary union being brought about prematurely at a time when there is a wide divergence between the economic performance of member states. That would lead to serious rises in unemployment in some of the less developed parts of the Community, and that would undoubtedly give rise to political and international pressures for major transfers of resources from the Community's more prosperous members. Such transfers would place on the Community's budget a burden that it simply could not sustain. Those implications of monetary union have not begun to be considered seriously enough in most of the other member states.

In her typically courageous way, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was the first, and so far the only, Head of Government in the Community who had the realism to raise those issues. I hope that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the other Ministers who take part in the discussions will strive for a wider debate in other member states so that these issues may be understood.

Whatever one's views about the desirability in the fullness of time of economic and monetary union, they are simply not practical in the immediate future or even in the easily foreseeable future. When people realise that, we will get a more rational, practical and sensible debate about economic developments and progress in the Community and will be more likely to make a success of it.

I hope that the legacy of realism and creative proposals for the development of the Community left to us by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley can be taken forward by her successor into the 1990s. It will be a major credit to her if the Community can develop more realistically rather than getting sidetracked by rather weird and wonderful abstract concepts which are the enemy of dealing with its immediate practical problems. I shall end on that note because others want to take part in the debate. I have already come to the conclusion that I shall not have the opportunity to debate my motion, so I am grateful to have had the chance to take part in this debate.

1.55 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) spoke about how the previous Prime Minister played a significant part in the development of the Common Market over the past five years. I do not doubt for a minute that one can see where her footprints have been inside the Common Market, but her role was not the one painted by the populist press. The hon. Gentleman referred to the money that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) brought back from the Common Market negotiations shortly after she became Prime Minister. If anybody cared to look at the amount that we are now paying into the Common Market, he would begin to wonder what happened to those barrel loads of money. We are paying £2·5 billion towards it. When I say "We", I do not mean Members of Parliament. I mean those 50 million or so people in Britain who pay that money so that Britain can be a member of the club called the Common Market, which has been an unmitigated disaster since Britain went into it.

Many people in Britain, especially those in Parliament, have got on the gravy train of the Common Market and go on every possible jaunt. They believe that the Common Market is here to stay and that the Rome treaty will last for ever. What nonsense. In the past 1,200 or 1,300 years, thousands of treaties have been made in Europe. Where are most of them now? In the dustbin. That will happen to the Rome treaty. It is based on the free movement of capital and labour, which preceded the monetarism of this Government and of the American Government headed first by Ronald Reagan and now by Bush.

Let us dismiss the idea that the ex-Prime Minister was doing a great job for Britain in the Common Market. Not only did she not bring the money back, but we have now paid £14,000 million to the Common Market, to be a member. A man can join a miners' welfare in Derbyshire for 4s 4d in old money and get a better return on his cash. Every family in Britain is paying £17 a week to finance the farmers of Germany, France and the rest of the Common Market.

The right hon. Lady said that she was against a European market and Labour Members thought that that was a good idea and that we should vote against it because it would give more power to the Germans and the rest of them in the Common Market, so we voted against it. What did the ex-Prime Minister do? She got her troops together—this was when she used to control them—and said, "We're going to stop those Opposition Members, and some of ours, talking about the Common Market and we'll have a guillotine." She then forced it through. Then she had the cheek to go on television with Brian Walden and all those other patsies and kid them on that somehow she stands up for Britain. It is the biggest load of hypocrisy I have ever seen in my time as a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): What about the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)?

Mr. Skinner: The new bloke? The grey man? He used to be called John Major-Ball. He was so ashamed of his name that he dropped his Ball. Has anybody seen him perform?

[Mr. Skinner]

He was put there because the Tory party got fed up of the previous Prime Minister and decided to knife her and turn her out like a dog in the night.

Mr. Anderson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Conservative party has made a major new blunder? Instead of embarking on a new, classless society, the Prime Minister has recreated the hereditary principle in favour of Denis Thatcher.

Mr. Skinner: I have the news here. It has just been announced on the wireless that the Deaconess of Dulwich has got an Order of Merit and he will be a baronet, whatever that is worth. I suppose that it gets him into the House of Lords, with £100 a day tax-free expenses and all the rest of it.

The Prime Minister says that she is against the single European market, yet she hands over even more power to Helmut Kohl and all the rest of them. Then she says that she is against the exchange rate mechanism. She kids all the people who are daft enough to listen to her that she is against that, too. What happens? A couple of her people in prominent Cabinet positions knife her. They tell her, "If you don't accept ERM, we're going to resign." So she brings a podium out into the middle of Downing street, behind those big Ceausescu gates that she had built for protection, and says "We"—note the "we"—"are in favour of ERM." She brags about it. That has been the tale all along—kidding people on. She had the newspapers to back her, by and large, especially Mr. Murdoch and his gang. They met her every so often to have a glass or two of whisky on the side so that she could tell them what to put in the papers the following morning.

That is the legacy of the past 11 years. When I was asked on television what the legacy of the Thatcher years was, I said that she had been sacked and Scargill is still in office.

Mr. John Marshall: Does Mr. Scargill intend to stand for re-election?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman talks about re-election. When I stood outside Committee Room 12 asking Tory Members how they had voted, the hon. Gentleman was one of those who were very quiet about how they had voted in the second ballot. Why was that? He was after a job from whoever of the three won. He was one of the 500 Tory Members—that inflated number—who were telling every pollster in sight that they were backing whoever might win because they wanted a job and a ministerial car.

Mr. Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Skinner: I do not have time to give way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Very well, if the hon. Gentleman is desperate.

Mr. Marshall: In all honesty, the hon. Gentleman ought to recognise that he never asked me how I had voted in either ballot. I should like to place it on record that I supported my political neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), in the first ballot. I stated in the press before the second ballot took place that I intended to support my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the present Prime Minister. If the hon. Gentleman were to look at the press instead of indulging in fiction, he would discover those things in advance.

Mr. Skinner: That is the third one this morning who has declared after the event. I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman does not say to the Back-Bench 1922 Committee, "Next time, we want a recorded vote." Every vote in the House of Commons is recorded. Every time we decide to vote, whether for or against the Common Market, or the Budget, our vote is recorded, so that people understand how we voted. It is high time that the Tory party did what the Labour party does and declared how its members vote. That is one change that it ought to make.

Something else has characterised the past 11 years—money for the wealthy. A recent calculation showed that during the past 11 years the wealthiest 1 per cent. in Britain received £26·2 billion in tax cuts, yet the poorest in Britain finished up paying more. That is a real redistribution of wealth. The previous Prime Minister knew what she was on about. When she got her mandate in 1979 she knew that what she had to do was to finance the people who financed the Tory party—to put money into the pockets of the City. That is why we have had a casino economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) referred to manufacturing industry, which, he says has been decimated. It has. One sector of the economy is not, however, under attack. That is the casino economy. If we walk down the main street in any town or city in Great Britain, we see finance houses, whether they be represented by building societies or estate agents. They are not selling many houses, not with interest rates so high. However, they represent the massive shift in Britain's economy. When we walked down the main street 20 years ago, we saw a different set of shops. Everything has changed. The casino economy is all about allowing people to make money out of somebody else's money.

Mrs. Gorman: In his thesis, how does the hon. Gentleman account for the growth of hypermarkets, supermarkets and shopping malls, particularly in the north of England, where the spending power of ordinary people on a Saturday afternoon exceeds that of people in the south because of the prosperity achieved in the north by this Government?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Lady talks about prosperity. I invite her to go along the Strand after 7 pm or 8 pm when the shops are shut and to have a look in the doorways. When I came down here in 1970, I never walked along the Strand and saw rows of cardboard boxes. I never went to Waterloo station and saw a cardboard city. When people ask me, "What is the legacy of the past 11 years?", I say that we now have a tourist attraction at Waterloo called cardboard city.

That is there because there has been hardly any public sector housebuilding in the past 11 years. In our last year in office, we had 112,000 public sector council houses built. That was not enough in my opinion, but there were times when the figure was higher than that. What is it now? It is a job to get top side of 20,000 in the public sector. Is it any wonder that people are coming down to the city of London on their bikes? The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), before he took all his directorships, said, "Get on your bike," so they came to London on their bikes but finished up squatting and littered about in doorways. That is the legacy of Thatcherism. She has redistributed wealth

to the wealthiest 1 per cent.—her own friends and the same people who have given her the Order of Merit. They have benefited well. The Queen does not pay the poll tax.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as he is in mid-rant. In 1977, 1978 and 1979, I had the habit of going on the soup runs in London with Father John Cusack of the Cyrenians. The hon. Gentleman will probably discover that the needs of people sleeping rough in London have not changed much in the past 100 years.

Mr. Anderson: It was not a cardboard city then.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) says that it was not a cardboard city. It was behind the Savoy and the Regent Palace hotel, at Waterloo and where the soup run starts at Bondway. The hon. Gentleman can see for himself now. We should recognise with some humility that those problems need dealing with and that they existed before.

Mr. Skinner: It stares anybody in the face. The Government can try to fiddle the figures, as they do for the cost of living figures, the balance of payments figures—they will fiddle them before the next election—the dole figures or the housing figures. The truth is that it is staring people in the face, and that is the legacy of the past 11 years.

It is also true in the national health service, where 71,000 beds have gone missing. Why? Because the Government decided that it is better to look after the private system inside and outside the national health service. That is why there are 71,000 fewer beds. That is why, instead of a waiting list of just over 500,000, we now have a waiting list of well over 1 million.

After 11 years, our schools are crumbling. Last year, 50,000 teachers quit the profession because of bad pay and the state of schools. That is what happens when the Government decide to look after the wealthy and forget the rest of the nation.

Tory Members table motions paying a wonderful tribute to the previous Prime Minister. She knew what she was about, and the rest of them followed, except those who got the sack. Nineteen ex-Cabinet Ministers now have 59 directorships between them. They are not too unhappy about the past 11 years. I am talking about only the 19 ex-Cabinet Ministers, but 200 Tory Members have other moonlighting jobs.

I tell my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin that we want something in the next Labour manifesto, and it is quite simple. It is high time that Labour said that when it is elected we shall have full-time Members of Parliament with one job only. That would send some of that lot scurrying for cover.

Mr. Wilshire: Some of your lot too.

Mr. Skinner: That might be true, but not of me. I cannot speak for those who are not satisfied with £26,000 a year; I think that it is a lot of money. I cannot understand why people need extra jobs to make a living. There are more than 2 million people out of work. Thousands of young lad and lasses who have left school under Thatcher have never had a job. They have flitted from one employment training scheme to the next slave labour scheme and have been paid £26 or £27 a week. We should encourage young people to vote for Labour. We should say that the next Labour Government will ensure that training will be proper training and that the trade union rates of pay will be applicable to the job.

Mr. Anderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is curious that so many former Cabinet Ministers resigned so that they could have more time with their families and then immediately took jobs that prevented them from having time with their families?

Mr. Skinner: I do not know about that. I know that it is all about money and I do not get caught up in little cul-de-sacs. If politics in the real world is about anything, it is about changing the system. It is about giving more money to one side than to the other. I have not been elected here to play silly little games. I believe that my job is to represent my class. When the next Labour Government come to power, I want them to redistribute some of the wealth. I want them to bring back the £26 billion that has gone to the wealthiest 1 per cent. and to use it to finance the national health service.

Mr. Wilshire: We can all tolerate being shouted at and we can all tolerate party political abuse. However, did I hear the hon. Gentleman correctly? Did he say that he was sent here to represent his class? Is he saying that the constituents whom he does not consider to be of his class are not worthy of his efforts or of his representation? If so, it is a disgrace.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman does not know what "class" means. It is not about for whom people vote, but about those who are exploiting and those who are being exploited.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): We know what you mean, Dennis.

Mr. Skinner: I shall explain to the hon. Gentleman who, as a Whip, is supposed to be quiet. If an old lady in my constituency who might have voted for the Tories complains about a landlord who might have voted Labour because the bedroom window is falling out, it is my job to represent that old lady irrespective of how she voted because she is being exploited by the bosses.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman said the opposite.

Mr. Skinner: No, I did not. The hon. Gentleman does not know the meaning of the word "class". It is about those who are exploited as opposed to those who do the exploiting. The Tory party represents the wealthy, exploiting class and the Labour party, traditionally, should represent those who are being exploited. It is not a question of whom people vote for. It is not, for example, my job to put more money into the banker's pocket. However, if the banker comes to me and says, "I have never voted for you, Mr. Skinner, but I have to tell you that I have fallen on hard times, I have had to apply for supplementary benefit and this lousy, rotten Government have taken £5 a week off me so I can't make ends meet", he is then a part of that exploited class.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman is back-tracking now.

Mr. Skinner: No, I am clear about this; I have always held this view. If the hon. Gentleman had been in the

[Mr. Skinner]

House longer, he might have heard my views before. I have no difficulty in representing constituents who have problems.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): My hon. Friend will remember something that the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) has forgotten. A former Labour Prime Minister got it right when he made a distinction between those who make money and those who earn it. Is not it true that a graduate of Oxford university—who might be regarded as being of a certain class, even if he has a third or fourth-class chemistry degree—who becomes a teacher in a school may be exploited and that someone who leaves school with two O-levels and who goes into a bank may be exploiting him? This Government have destroyed the teachers' negotiating machinery.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend used to be a teacher, so he knows about that.

Examples of exploitation are to be found in every walk of life and it is the job of Labour Members to represent the exploited. Conservative Members represent the bosses. That is why the new Prime Minister's talk of a classless society is such nonsense. What a joke. Whoever heard of a Tory Member wanting a classless society? If the right hon. Gentleman is to achieve a classless society, he must get rid of the royal family. If he wants a classless society, he must get rid of the House of Lords, yet the Conservatives prop it up; there are four Tory members to every Labour member. I believe in abolishing the House of Lords and I shall be happy to support the Prime Minister if he wants to abolish it. But he ain't going to do it. He is trotting out generalisations which mean nothing.

If the Prime Minister wants a classless society, he must get rid of all the private beds in the national health service. In a classless society, we cannot have tax breaks for the wealthy, or an honours list. In a classless society, we cannot give people the privilege of sending their kids to public schools and have the ordinary taxpayer foot the bill.

Mrs. Gorman: In a really classless society, people would keep their money and be able to buy private education instead of putting up with the rotten lousy state stuff in socialist-controlled inner cities. People would be able to buy health care in place of some of the stuff doled out in the state-controlled health service and they would all be properly housed because we would have an effective and healthy private housing sector—something that the Labour party has been opposing for as long as I can remember.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Lady has spelt out her idea of a classless society. It is about jumping the queue and about privilege. It is about people lining their pockets and leaving people down there in the gutter to fend for themselves. The hon. Lady has made it clear where she stands. In a classless society, she would have trouble looking after the Wimbledon ticket touts because there would not be any. Everyone would have a ticket to Wimbledon. When the revolution starts under the new Prime Minister's regime, everybody will have a ticket to the Henley regatta. It is a joke. It is one of the daftest things that the Prime Minister has said. Mind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he has been in the job for only three weeks so perhaps it was said in a flurry of excitement. The truth is that he will not be able to sustain it.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin about the legacy of the past 11 years. During that period, the education system has lost £3·75 billion and 468 hospitals have closed. The economy is up to its neck in trouble. We were lectured to by a Cabinet full of business men—and one woman—and told that Labour could not run the economy, but that same Cabinet has produced the worst economic situation that we have had since the end of the second world war. Not only did we have a trade deficit of £20 billion last year; the chances are that this year the deficit will exceed the forecast made by the Chancellor in his autumn statement. It will get even worse.

The Government have made invisibles invisible. We have lost every single benefit that we had. The Government used to tell us that we could make £700 million a month on trade in invisibles. They used to tell the workers, "Never mind the deficit in manufactured goods; we can always make it up from the City." All that has disappeared from view after 11 years of what they call "Thatcherism". In addition, companies are borrowing more money today in an attempt to keep their heads above water than at any time in the past 50 years. The present figure for company borrowing is £6,000 million. That is the legacy of Thatcherism.

There have also been more than 120,000 bankruptcies and liquidations over the past 11 years. All that has happened while the Government have had the benefit of North sea oil. The other day it was announced that over the past 11 years more than £100 billion has been created for the Government through the taxation of North sea oil receipts. The previous Labour Government did not have the benefit of that money. When we get back into power, we must use that sort of money not for the rich, the wealthy or the bosses who had a 28 per cent. pay increase last year and a 33 per cent. increase the year before when the ambulance workers were told that they must make do with 6·5 per cent., but to finance the national health service and to give back to pensioners the £13 a week that the Government robbed them of by changing the system of payments for pensioners.

As I said, there have been more than 120,000 bankruptcies and liquidations. Even the Tory party's own blue rosette company has gone bankrupt. Similarly, the County Hall development group, which was to take over the GLC building, has gone bankrupt. It is an ill wind that blows no one any good and I cheered when I heard about that.

Over the past 11 years, people in the City of London have made money for themselves, not for the country. They are now asking us to bail them out. The new Secretary of State for the Environment came into the House the other day and said—and I am paraphrasing him here—"We are in a hell of a mess. Can you bail us out? We've been hammering these people with the poll tax and 14 million of them are not paying. Will you in the Opposition come to our aid?" Some chance. The only way to resolve the problem of the poll tax is to get rid of it, a proposal that was passed by the Labour party executive recently and has now become Labour party policy.

When the former Prime Minister came to power, credit represented 45 per cent. of take-home pay once national insurance and income tax had been subtracted from average income. For every £100 earned by the ordinary

person, £45 went on credit. We must remember that the former Prime Minister told us that if a Labour Government were elected, they would borrow. That was their maxim. After the past 11 years, the average earner now pays out 87 per cent. of his income in borrowing and credit. So much for all that talk about borrowing.

The Thatcher Government preached to people not to borrow, but the country is awash with credit. That is the legacy. I believe that that problem will haunt successive Governments for a long time to come. There has also been much talk about shares and this property-owning, share-owning democracy. When the former Prime Minister came to power, pension funds and private institutions held 60 per cent. of the wealth in shares. The Government and overseas investors owned 10 per cent. and 30 per cent. was owned by private individuals. After all those so called privatisations, the figures have hardly changed except the percentage owned by private individuals has fallen from 30 per cent. to 20 per cent. A few more people have the odd share here and there, but the general situation has not improved.

In a way, I suppose that I am pleased with the motion because it gives us a chance to put the record straight. People ouside have had a bellyful of Thatcherism. People must understand that the new regime is no different. They represent the same class interests that the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) represents. He represents the interests of the bosses and the wealthy. I represent another interest—those who are exploited. Under the new regime, now that they have shuffled the pack, things will be the same as before. There will be no concessions to the poor. I challenge the Treasury Bench—now that the Government are talking about consultation—to ask Labour Members to help to formulate the next Budget. If it is all right for the poll tax, let us formulate the Budget. Let us have consultation and let us tell the Government what we shall do with the Budget. Let us tell them that we shall take the £26 billion that has gone to the wealthiest 1 per cent. Let us tell them about taxation, VAT, and the run-down of our schools and our health service. Let us tell them that we want to spend another £5 billion, £6 billion or £7 billion on those who must use those services. What a great opportunity. If we are in the business of consultation, let us have it right across the board.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): We know what the Labour party means by consultation on the Budget. I seem to remember that, when Labour Members were in office, they let the last two or three be written by the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Skinner: I was around at the time—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was. I was one of those who did not support that. The Prime Minister of the day should have said to the IMF—I tell the hon. Gentleman because he does not seem to understand—"Look here, we have some North sea oil revenues round the corner. We have a lot of collateral and we are going to use it, so don't tell us what to do." I would have said to Mr. Witteveen, or whatever his name was, "Sling your hook, we will look after our own affairs." I would say the same to Helmut Kohl now that the Tory Government have got into bed with the rest of them, with the ERM, EMU, the single currency, and the central European bank. It applies to everybody—I would say the same to them.

Helmut Kohl is not a socialist. He has just been returned with a majority, with the help of his Free Democrats, for another four years. The British people do not want to be dominated by the German Bundesbank. Do not worry about that. I would say the same to Witteveen as I would to Helmut Kohl and all the rest. I do not take kindly to the idea that, somehow, this nation is not big enough to stand on its own two feet. I know what we need to do to make sure that we win votes and keep them for the future, and that is to ensure that we keep our promises to the people and the class we represent. We must say to them that we shall take money out of the pockets of the rich and finance the health service, look after pensioners, start building houses again, and look after the education system. Conservative Members tell me that socialism has dropped off the end of the agenda, but there are lots of things to do. If only we cleaned up the cardboard city, which is a legacy of the Government, we would make a start.

I am not too bothered now that the 11 years have gone. I am a socialist, and a socialist has to be an optimist. I am concerned about the next 11 years. I want to make sure that when we formulate our plans and put them before the British people, they are capable of getting support from the British people for the 11 years that it will take for us to clean up the mess that the Tories have left, and that they provide benefits for our people.

2.28 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): After that socialist rant in which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) failed to justify why droves and droves of his so-called class, to which he somehow lays claim, managed to vote us into power three times in a row with a massive majority, which no Opposition Government have ever achieved in his lifetime or in mine, I can tell him that we know perfectly well where people see their best interests being protected—and that is with the Conservative party, not the Opposition.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), whom we are discussing, led the country to three magnificent Conservative victories. I had hoped that she would do the same again, but matters turned out differently. However, I shall not go over that again.

We are here to talk about my right hon. Friend's great personal qualities, which are so well recognised outside the House by the public that many people are still grieving for her loss. My right hon. Friend was not only the leader of our Conservative party; she was the Prime Minister and a great international figure. We should continue——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND ARTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Win Griffiths be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mrs. Sylvia Heal be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EMPLOYMENT

Ordered,

That Sir Philip Goodhart be discharged from the Employment Committee and Mr. Ian Bruce be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

HEALTH

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. James Couchman, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Alice Mahon, Sir David Price, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Audrey Wise be members of the Health Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West), Mr. Ian McCartney and Mr. Patrick Nicholls be members of the Social Security Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Coinage

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.31 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I welcome this opportunity to introduce a debate on the currency coins of the United Kingdom. There are several features desirable in a national coinage. They include the following: the coinage should be simple; it should be flexible—and convenient for money transactions of all values; it should be lasting; and the coins should command respect, with a consistent relationship between denominations, size, metal and design. The question is whether our present coinage meets those objectives. There is no truly scientific way of measuring the coinage needs of the public. The choice of denominations rests more on history and on demand stimulated by vending machine operators, as well as on the demand for coins from bank stocks.

In theory, our present currency coins include the following: the crown piece, formerly of a nominal 25-pence value and now denominated as £5, but not in circulation as a currency coin; the £2 coin, issued in 1986 and 1989 for commemorative purposes—but with a currency version which has received limited use; and the seven regular currency coins in the denominational values of £1, 50p, 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p and 1p.

The antecedents of our coins can be traced back over many centuries. The penny derives its origin indirectly from the Roman denarius coin, first struck about 269 BC. For a period of 500 years, the silver penny was virtually the only coin struck by the Royal Mint. The process of inflation reduced this silver coin to a diminutive size. The first copper penny was issued in 1797, and the penny name was retained when the decimal currency system was introduced in 1971.

The bronze 2p was introduced into the coinage with decimalisation and in the early 1970s was an essential part of the coinage system. The coin weight is 7·128 g and the diameter is 25·91 mm. In March this year it was estimated that 3,500 million were in circulation, but by February this year the excess cost to the Treasury of providing the 1p and 2p coins in bronze was estimated at between £2 million and £4 million per year, and from next year these coins will be issued in copper-plated steel. The question must be whether the public requires six low-value coins and whether the 2p is wanted at all. Its place in the coinage can be questioned on both philosophical and practical grounds.

The 5p and 10p pieces have long antecedents. The 5p was the shilling in the old pounds, shillings and pence system. As a currency coin, the shilling was introduced at the beginning of the 16th century, during the last years of the reign of Henry VII. The recoinage of 1816 brought into use the size and weight of the shilling, which became the 5p in 1971 and which is being progressively withdrawn, with the introduction this year of the smaller sized 5p piece. For a remarkable 174 years, the public has enjoyed the use of a coin of consistent size and shape. That indeed is the test of a coinage being designed to be of lasting value.

The 10p piece started life as the Victorian florin and was first issued in 1849. As a two-shilling piece, it was one tenth of a pound and was intended to be the forerunner of a decimal coinage system which, in the event, did not happen until 1971. In 1992, the present 10p will be replaced by a

smaller version proportionate in size and weight to the new 5p. The new-size 5p and 10p coins are excellent and, I hope, will stand the test of time, but whether they will both be around in 100 years' time will depend on the success of successive Chancellors of the Exchequer in their battle against inflation.

The 20p piece has no long and honourable history—it is the creature of expediency. In 1981, a mere 10 years after decimalisation, the Treasury said that the then current range of coins was inadequate. The heavy 10p coin was in demand to pay for a range of goods sold through vending and ticket machines and in quantity the coins were too heavy. The seven-sided cupro-nickel 20p coin was first issued in 1982. Although about 1,300 million are in circulation, it is not the most popular of coins as it is inconsistent in size and weight with the other low-value coins.

The 50p piece was introduced into the coinage in 1969, when it replaced the old 10-shilling bank note. As a seven-sided coin it weighs 13·500 grams. It is now too heavy and is a very unpopular coin, with a circulation little different from 10 years ago, at an estimated 676 million pieces. The decrease in demand is attributed, anecdotally rather than scientifically, to the alteration of many vending and other slot machines to accept the £1 coin. Common sense suggests that that, in turn, is due to a general debasing of the currency by price inflation. But if that implies a consistently smaller coinage to reflect diminished buying power the argument favours abolishing the current 50p and replacing it with a smaller coin.

The £1 coin was a welcome innovation of 1983, for which I campaigned. It weighs 9 grams and has become an essential feature of our coinage.

The Royal Mint has been considering a revised round cupro-nickel 50p piece. I have seen a photograph of the trial pieces. Such a new coin would be proportionate in size and weight to the new 10p to be issued in 1992. The introduction of the new 10p in 1992 and the withdrawal of the old coin will make the current 10p "slot" available for a circulating £2 coin. The currency version of the coin has been available since 1986.

Coinage should also be convenient to the user. The public, the banks and the vending machine industry all require the certainty of a consistent range of coins of regular shape which are distinguishable by sight and touch. Coins should be small and light. Heavy coins like the 50p piece burn holes in the ordinary user's pocket, are unpopular with those who carry around large quantities of coins, and add extra costs to transport and security. Today, the 50p piece is most unpopular.

There are also other important points to take into account. For the banking industry, the principal costs are handling, transport storage, packing and lost investment opportunity. Several points follow from that. Generally speaking, the fewer the denominations in issue, the lower the costs of handling, storage and interest lost. In relation to their value, the costs of handling the existing low-denomination bronze coins are much higher than for handling the existing 5p and 10p coins. Weight and bulk are critical factors in transport, storage and handling costs.

Unlike the situation in most EC countries, coin not used by bank customers cannot automatically be returned to the issuing authorities for value. Therefore, it can be argued that the coinage is not properly responsive to demand—there is an administrative impediment to the operation of market forces which works to the detriment of the banking industry and its customers, the public. With the prospect of eight currency coins from £2 to 1p, six of these in low-value denominations, has the time not come to drop the 2p and 20p pieces, to redesign the 50p piece, reducing it in weight and size, and to bring the existing £2 coin into regular circulation?

I urge upon my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is also the Master of the Mint, this urgent coinage reform. Coupled with the defeat of inflation, my right hon. Friend could give the people of the United Kingdom a coinage of convenience of which they could be proud.

2.43 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) for giving us an opportunity to debate a subject of interest to a great many people, many of whom hold strong views. I thank my hon. Friend, too, for obtaining his Adjournment debate at a relatively civilised hour—Friday afternoons are occasions when we are all happy to conduct Adjournment debates. I understand that the last time my hon. Friend was successful in obtaining an Adjournment debate was in 1986, when he advocated a £2 note and managed to secure a slot at 5 am on a Thursday morning. This occasion is certainly a considerable improvement on that.

Sir John Wheeler: I interrupt my hon. Friend merely to correct him on one important point. I have never advocated the introduction of a £2 banknote—only a £2 coin.

Mr. Maples: I apologise to my hon. Friend. That brings me to my second point. I entered into the response to the debate with some sense of inadequacy because I know that my hon. Friend is knowledgeable on the subject. He is a keen collector and student of British and Commonwealth coins and, with another friend of mine, has written a book on the subject. I thought that I had better get the book out of the Library, but I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me when I say that I did not get very far with it. The book shows that he and his co-author know a considerable amount about the British coinage.

There are nearly 15 billion coins in circulation. I have found the Royal Mint one of the interesting areas of responsibility that I have acquired with my present job, and although I have had it for only a short time I have quickly discovered the depth of public feeling about the sort of issues covered in this debate—the size, convenience and quality of the currency, and the ease with which it can be recognised.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he was Master of the Mint, said at this year's Trial of the Pyx:

> "It is a brave Minister who interferes with anything so familiar to the public as the coins in their pockets."

However, from time to time we have to do so. In view of that, and of the extensive knowledge of the subject on the part of my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North, I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend welcome the new 5p coin and other changes that we have recently announced.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the features that should attach to a coinage system. He listed simplicity, convenience and respect—all important aspects of a good system. It is also important that people should be able readily to distinguish between coins by sight and by touch.

[Mr. Maples]

The latter point is particularly important to visually handicapped and blind people. I know that the Royal Mint has always taken care to ensure that it consults those who represent the blind, or the blind themselves, before finishing any design. In that way, it can ensure that the new design will be readily recognisable and distinguishable from other coins, so that there is no danger of muddling them.

As the cost of producing coins falls on the taxpayer, it is also important that production and distribution costs be kept under control. However, as my hon. Friend suggested, the key issue is public acceptability. When the current 5p and 10p coins were introduced, they retained the same size and weight as the old shilling and florin to minimise the changes arising from decimalisation. In recent years, however, there has been increasing and understandable criticism of the weight of the average pocketful of change. Perhaps some of our coins are too big and heavy.

As a result, just over three years ago, in 1987, the Mint began consulting the public about replacing some coins with lighter ones. Researchers at the university of Nottingham were enlisted to study how easily various sizes of coin could be distinguished. Among those asked to test the designs were elderly residents in sheltered accommodation and blind people.

To ensure public acceptability of any change in the coinage, the Minister issued a consultative pamphlet in 1987. I am sure that my hon. Friend was one of the many people who responded to it. It set out some options for changing the coinage, one of which was no change at all. The pamphlet showed what the current coinage was and gave four options. This fairly extensive consultation resulted in 3,000 replies to the Mint, which it analysed in some detail. As a result of that, the Government decided to implement the most popular option—option 4, which was to introduce smaller and, more importantly, lighter 5p and 10p coins. Other options involved leaving them the same size or making them much smaller, but option 4 seemed to appeal to most people most.

The new 10p coin will be introduced in September 1992. I have a sample of it with me and I should be happy to show it to my hon. Friend afterwards. I think that he will agree that it is an attractive coin, which I hope will meet the tests to which my hon. Friend believes coins should be subjected. People will certainly find that weight of coins in their pockets significantly reduced.

I should perhaps take this opportunity to remind the House that the old 5p coin will cease to be legal tender after 31 December 1990. That means that it is time for people who, like me, keep their loose change in jam jars or bottles, to empty them out. Some charities, including the BBC's "Children in Need" appeal, collect old coins. Anyone who finds themselves with spare coins might care to donate them to that worthy cause.

As my hon. Friend said the 5p coin has a long and distinguished history. As a unit of value, the shilling can be traced back to Anglo-Saxon times, when it was said to be worth a single sheet. By the time the last shilling was issued in 1966, it would just about buy a bar of chocolate. Although the reduction in the size of the 5p coin represents a break with a tradition dating back to the recoinage following the Battle of Waterloo, it could equally be viewed as the return of the much-loved sixpence. The new 5p coin is almost exactly the same size as the old sixpence, a coin which was used for more than 400 years from its issue in 1551 until it was demonetised in 1980. Over that period, its uses and users were numerous—ranging from the tooth fairy of our childhood to the sixpence found in Christmas puddings.

One of the many benefits which flow from controlling inflation is that it enables coins to continue in circulation for many years. I share my hon. Friend's hope that the new coins will stand the test of time. My hon. Friend mentioned inflation which, unfortunately, has a history at least as long as that of the shilling, although somewhat less distinguished. In 1544 Henry VIII introduced a silver shilling which was only one third silver. As a consequence of that debasing of the coinage, the high points of the obverse—in particular, the King's nose—wore through and the predominant copper colour started to show.

As my hon. Friend observed the rising price of base metals on the world market means that 1p and 2p coins now cost more to produce than their face value. That is clearly unsustainable and illogical, as my hon. Friend agrees, and the Government have therefore decided to introduce coins made of copper-plated steel. I understand from the Mint that modern technology means that the fate of the Tudor nose will not be repeated and that we can guarantee that the coins will retain their copper colour even though there is steel underneath. The coins will look and weigh the same as existing coins but will be slightly thicker. The only people likely to notice the difference are those involved in the vending machine industry. The public will not notice any difference at all.

Sir John Wheeler: Would my hon. Friend like to go one step further by following my advice and abolishing the 2p altogether? As I have said, it is not merely the denomination of the coin but the formidable cost of transport and storage that impinge upon the public.

Mr. Maples: I was about to deal with the 2p coin. I do not think that there is quite the overwhelming case that my hon. Friend makes out for doing away with it altogether. We would simply have to have more 1p coins, but I will deal with that in a moment.

To minimise the disruption faced by people in the vending machine industry, we have decided to introduce the new 1p and 2p coins at the same time as the introduction of the new 10p coin. In addition, the Mint will provide its usual high level of technical assistance and a supply of sample coins to the vending machine industry. My hon. Friend says that the 2p coin is not required, and one of the options put forward in 1987 involved the abolition of that coin. That was option 2 in the pamphlet to which I have referred, but it did not find much favour in public consultation. Perhaps one of the reasons for that is that if there were no 2p coins, which as my hon. Friend said are rather bulky, many more 1p coins would need to be produced and put into circulation.

The Royal Mint has achieved extremely high levels of productivity and output in producing the 1,400 million new 5p coins which will be issued by the end of the year. I congratulate all those who work at the Mint on their performance, not only in producing the new coins and our coinage generally, but on their high level of sales to overseas customers. The Mint managed to produce a profit last year of more than £12 million. That accrues to the

Treasury, and I am pleased to be able to report that that excellent performance seems to be continuing in the current year. However, the Royal Mint would find it an enormous task to replace with sufficient pennies the 3·5 billion 2p coins currently in circulation. Abolishing the 2p would result in a substantial cost to the taxpayer. The number of coins in circulation and the 300 million new 2p coins issued annually also show that the coin is perhaps not so unpopular as my hon. Friend suggests. I suspect that most people would prefer not to have to handle even more pennies than they do at present. There is no immediate danger of the penny becoming unpopular or being abolished as there are 5·5 billion in circulation.

My hon. Friend also suggested that the 20p coin should be abolished. Although this coin was initially unpopular, it quickly became widely accepted and, as my hon. Friend said, there are now 1,300 million in circulation compared with 1,500 million 10p coins. I think that many people find it convenient to have a coin which bridges the gap between the 10p and 50p coins. The 20p both reduces the weight of the coinage and serves a useful function in vending machines, while its shape means that it is readily identified by the groups that we have discussed.

My hon. Friend called for the 50p coin to be reduced in size and made round. The 1987 pamphlet included three options with a smaller, round 50p coin, but each of those options involved a smaller 10p coin than will be introduced in 1992 and none received significant public support. The most popular option, which the Government are implementing, involves a 10p coin of 24·5 millimetres —about the same size as the old shilling—and thus limits the extent to which the 50p can be made smaller as coins of different denominations must differ significantly in size to be distinguishable both by people and by machines. As a result, a round 50p coin would need to be nearly as large as the current 10p coin. In addition, a survey commissioned by the Mint in 1987 found that 69 per cent. of those questioned thought that it was a bad idea to reduce the size of this coin. Given the number of changes that either have been introduced or are in the pipeline, I do not believe that the case for a new 50p coin has been made.

My hon. Friend also favoured the introduction of a £2 coin. However, as he recognised, there is a limit to how many different denominations can be in circulation at any one time. Commemorative £2 coins have proved very popular, but people have preferred to keep the coins rather than spend them. This suggests that at present a £2 coin is not required for general circulation, although we shall keep this suggestion and, indeed, all matters relating to the coinage, under review.

It would be wrong for a debate on the United Kingdom coinage system, particularly the new coins, to pass without a reference to the work of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee. This committee, under the chairmanship of the Duke of Edinburgh, considers all new designs for United Kingdom coins. In this way, it plays an important part in maintaining the high standards of numismatic art traditionally associated with Britain's coins and I take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee for their work.

In conclusion, I repeat my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North on giving us this opportunity to discuss the design of the United Kingdom coinage system. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that many people take the view that there is much to be said for limiting the frequency with which new coins are introduced. I believe that the new coins that we have announced represent sufficient change to the coinage system for the present. The coins that will be in circulation from September 1992 will be the result of extensive consultation with both the general public and special interest groups, and I hope and believe that they will provide a satisfactory system for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Electricity Privatisation

1. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the electricity industry flotation.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): This privatisation has been an outstanding success with the issue over 10 times subscribed. There were 12·75 million applications. Despite this, 97 per cent. of customers who applied and over two thirds of all who applied will receive some shares. About one quarter will receive all they applied for.

The continued overwhelming public interest in participating in privatisation shows the public support for the regional electricity companies and for privatisation.

Mr. Moate: May I be the first to congratulate my right hon. Friend and everyone else involved on successfully concluding today what must be the largest privatisation in the history of the western world? Does not the fact that some 5 million to 6 million people are believed to have applied for shares show that only a few in the socialist bastions on the Opposition Benches do not understand the instincts of the people of Britain for a capital-owning democracy?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right that the flotation has had massive public support. As I said, 12·75 million applications were made, and his estimate that between 5 million and 6 million customers were involved is not far from the mark. Over four and a half times as many people applied as did, for example, for shares in the water industry.

Mr. Benn: Is the Secretary of State aware that while he has been spending billions or millions of pounds of public money on floating off the electricity industry, 60,000 people were cut off in the Chesterfield district over the weekend due to the storms, 1,000 faults occurred and 20,000 emergency calls were made? Is he aware that many people will not be reconnected until the weekend and that their water supplies are affected, too? Is he aware that if he were a local councillor he would be surcharged for wilful neglect?

Mr. Speaker: Order. There will be a private notice question on that very matter later.

Mr. Benn: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, my question is about the ownership and control of the industry. People would be happy to plug into what they are buying.

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate the number of people whose electricity supply was cut off over the weekend. I was included in that number. I visited the National Grid control yesterday afternoon and I have spoken to the chairmen of the companies most affected. Altogether, 1 million customers lost supply at the peak. By early this morning that figure had been reduced to about 380,000. Most supplies should be back on today or tomorrow, but for some it may take longer. The companies have worked hard to restore supplies. The regional electricity companies that are not severely affected are providing assistance to others. Specialist contractors have been brought in and the Army is providing help. I am sure that the whole House wishes to join me in expressing appreciation of the hard work in difficult conditions which the engineers, linesmen and other staff are undertaking.

Mr. Hannam: Will my right hon. Friend accept our congratulations on the success of his undoubted personal efforts in attracting millions of shareholders into the electricity industry? Does he agree that that represents real public ownership, not the parody which the Labour party favours?

Mr. Wakeham: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. The sale of the 12 companies will realise £8 billion. That is a considerable achievement which disproves the allegation that the privatisation was too difficult to be completed. It represents excellent value for taxpayers.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, according to the audited accounts of the 12 regional companies and the National Grid Company, the net assets of the industry being sold at the moment are worth £16 billion? Will he confirm that he intends to sell those assets for less than £8 billion in total? What was his primary duty? Was it to look after the interests of the taxpayer and the electricity consumers whose bills helped to build up those assets over the years, or was it to bung £100 million to City advisers and underwriters who took no risks whatever?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has his way of looking at these things. My task was to find a proper price which was fair to the taxpayer and fair to those who were purchasing shares in the company. The price has been properly based on the value of anticipated future earnings and dividends. That is how the industry should be valued.

Mr. Morgan: Properly based? The right hon. Gentleman does not know what that means.

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman will keep quiet, I shall do my best to answer the supplementary question of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) may have a chance to ask a supplementary question, but at the moment I am trying to reply to his hon. Friend.

I have outlined the way in which the industry should be valued. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred to the current cost account of assets, or replacement costs, and that is not what the taxpayer paid for the assets. To go along the line that he recommends

and to realise proceeds equivalent to current cost account would mean a substantial increase in electricity prices. I am sure that that is not what the hon. Gentleman wants.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I just tell the House that although I understand the importance of what happened over the weekend several other questions on the Order Paper are more relevant to the bad weather that has been experienced in many parts of the country. Question 6 is, perhaps, an example.

Alternative Energy Sources

2. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he proposes to have discussions with the European Commission about alternative sources of energy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Alternative sources of energy are likely to feature in future Council discussions. The next Energy Council meeting is planned for 11 March 1991.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend think that too much research into alternative forms of energy is undertaken nationally? Should not more be undertaken on a Community basis?

Mr. Moynihan: I think that the balance is about right. It is important that we stimulate the development and application of renewable sources of energy wherever they have prospects of becoming economically competitive and environmentally acceptable. The European Community has an important role in this, as do the Government. I believe that we have the balance right at present.

Mr. John Evans: Will the Minister acknowledge that one vital source of alternative energy is conservation and that the insulation of buildings plays a crucial role in that? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, because there is no credible conservation policy in his Department, Pilkington in my constituency is having to lay off substantial numbers of staff due to a lack of orders? Is not it ironic that it is laying off staff during the coldest weather that we have experienced for a long time?

Mr. Moynihan: I am unaware of the specific example to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I agree with him, however, about the importance of conservation and of energy efficiency. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who is new to his job of Under-Secretary of State for Energy, has launched so energetically an energy efficiency programme during his first few weeks in post.

Sir Antony Buck: Is my hon. Friend aware that my grandfather built the last operative windmill in this country? Will he say a few words about the prospects of wind power? That is perhaps not an inappropriate question for me to ask in this Chamber.

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. and learned Friend will be delighted to learn that five new projects have come forward under the first tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State some months ago.

One problem in the important work that we are putting into developing environmentally acceptable and economically competitive wind power is posed by the many environmentalists who are in favour of wind power but strongly opposed to planning applications. More work needs to be done, especially with my colleagues in the Department of the Environment, on issuing planning policy guidance notes to assist councils.

North Sea (Safety)

4. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he proposes to take to improve safety in the North sea.

8. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with representatives of the offshore oil industry on the implementation of the Cullen report.

Mr. Moynihan: I regularly meet people from all sides of the offshore oil industry, and matters relating to the Cullen report are frequently discussed.

As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement on 12 November about the report of the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster, the Government are now acting to implement Lord Cullen's recommendations for a new regulatory system. We are determined to ensure that the lessons of the disaster are fully learnt and thoroughly put into effect.

Mr. Doran: The Minister will be aware that, with members of the Piper Alpha families and survivors group, I have organised a conference to debate the implementation of the Cullen report with particular reference to industrial relations. The Trades Union Congress, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the director general of the Health and Safety Executive, Mr. Rimington, have supported my efforts to organise that conference and I am grateful to the Minister for the particular support that he has given. Unfortunately, however, the oil industry has refused to participate. Does the Minister agree that health and safety and industrial relations are inextricably linked and that one cannot have bad industrial relations and good safety standards? Does he also agree that the oil industry has lost a valuable opportunity to discuss this important issue?

Mr. Moynihan: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his assiduous work in getting that conference off the ground. He is aware that I was keen to participate, but I am unable to do so at short notice. However, I am pleased that Mr. Tony Barrell will be attending the conference —he is the new head of the offshore safety division and I am sure that he will make an important contribution. I have also made it clear to the hon. Gentleman and those organising the conference that I am more than happy to meet the organisers whenever I am in Aberdeen or at a time of their convenience.

I accept that safety must be, and always has been, a top priority. Primary responsibility for safety rests with the operator and I am not convinced that emphasis should be placed too heavily on trade union membership. The important issue is to ensure that on each platform every worker has the opportunity, through his safety representative, to make his voice heard and his concerns clear. It is our determination that that must be the priority.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that those of us who live many miles from the sea, but have had the benefit of visiting those lonely, dangerous outposts in

the North sea, accept that if it cost another 1p a gallon or 1p a therm on gas from the gas fields to ensure that safety is the absolute top concern it would be money well spent? Lives will always be lost in those dangerous occupations, but the fewer the better. We can never justify making an extra penny for an extra life lost.

Mr. Moynihan: Offshore safety should never be sacrificed by anyone—on either side of the Chamber—because of lack of resources. We shall place resources at the forefront of our thinking when the changes necessary as a result of the Cullen report are implemented.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister recognise that, now that all Members have had time to study the Cullen report, one is forced to the conclusion that it is the most devastating indictment of any Government's health and safety record to be published? Is not it incredible that at the time of the Piper Alpha disaster 50 per cent. of inspectors' posts were vacant? Is not it also true that more than one third of those posts were vacant at the start of this year? Since the publication of the Cullen report what urgent action have the Government taken to secure an increase in the number of safety inspectors?

Mr. Moynihan: Many steps. First and foremost, we recognise that we want top qualified people in the inspectorate and to achieve that we must pay them. Before Lord Cullen's report was published a 23 per cent. pay increase was rightly awarded to the inspectorate to encourage more people to fill the vacancies. In 1977, the complement of inspectors was 21, but the complement in November this year was 60. In addition, approximately 250 man years have been devoted annually by technically qualified staff of the certifying authorities to the inspectorate. When staff from the inspectorate move to the Health and Safety Executive the priority will be to ensure that they are qualified to do the job and are properly remunerated. As I have already said, resources will be provided to ensure that that objective is achieved.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Although I welcome the Minister's initial acceptance of the recommendations of Lord Cullen's report, how are discussions going on transferring the safety division to the HSE? When those staff are transferred, will he ensure that the resources are available so that the new department does not suffer from the same shortages as were so devastatingly exposed by the Cullen report?

Mr. Moynihan: In fairness, I have answered the question on resources in the affirmative. As for the hon. Gentleman's first question, discussions are going well and are underlined with a sense of urgency about the need to implement the changes relevant to Government as soon as possible. The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that today the safety directorate has become the offshore safety division under Mr. Tony Barrell, who has joined us from the Health and Safety Executive. That is an important bridge to have crossed. Important work will now be done to implement the remaining recommendations as soon as possible.

Energy Strategy

6. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans to formulate and implement a long-term national strategy for energy.

Mr. Wakeham: Our strategy for energy has been stated on many occasions.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is not it a cruel irony that on the weekend when we saw the final stages of the flotation of the electricity industry, more than 5,000 of my constituents in the Borders were devoid of any electricity supply, sometimes for more than 24 hours, and that some of them are still cut off? Does the Secretary of State understand that were it not for the courage and dedication of the engineers and line staff, that figure would have been higher? When will the Government bring forward a long-term strategy for the energy industry to guarantee future security of supply and ensure that the supply system is hardened against adverse weather conditions so that the effects of events similar to those last weekend will, in future, be minimised?

Mr. Wakeham: I have already paid tribute to the work of all those who were, and still are, involved in restoring electricity supplies in the face of some extremely difficult weather conditions. The electricity companies and the Department are continually considering ways in which security of supply can be improved, and any lessons to be learnt will be learnt. Our broader energy policy is clear; it is to ensure that the United Kingdom has adequate and secure supplies of energy in the forms that people want it, at the lowest realistic prices, by subjecting as much of energy supply as is practical to the operation of market forces. That includes oil, gas, nuclear, renewables and coal.

As this is the last Question Time with Lord Haslam as chairman of British Coal, I hope that the House will not mind if I take the opportunity to record the Government's appreciation of the impressive leadership that he has given to the industry during the past five years.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Last week the chairman of British Coal announced excellent financial results and said that coal was king again and would feature in any future energy strategy. Those achievements were due entirely to the Government's policies and the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, which negotiated wages and conditions to allow greater take-home pay from productivity, while reducing coal prices to customers by 40 per cent. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the coal industry has a great future running into the next century as long as the miners watch their backs against the synthetic support of Opposition Members, one of whom has already betrayed the industry by replacing his coal-fired boiler with a gas one? I refer to none other than the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Wakeham: The coal industry has made significant improvements since the 1984-85 strike which we should recognise and which are a great tribute to the management and the miners. After the strike the average miner produced 571 tonnes of coal; today that figure is 1,080 tonnes. Since the end of the strike, output has remained almost unchanged, while the number of collieries has been halved without a single compulsory redundancy. As the House will know, British Coal recently achieved a new productivity record of more than 5 tonnes per man shift.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Secretary of State understand that people who have been without electricity over the past weekend appreciate only too well that their supplies have not been reconnected because the electricity companies

have been more concerned with selling off their assets in the privatisation organised by the Secretary of State, at less than half their proper value?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman's question convinces me that his party will never get into government again. If Labour has such contempt for the thousands of people in the electricity supply industry who worked their hardest over the weekend to restore supplies, no wonder people are looking elsewhere for political support.

Mr. Moss: The tremendous success of the first stage in the privatisation of the electricity industry is due not only to an attractive share flotation but to the radical reorganisation that the Government undertook in the generation and supply of electricity. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the statement recently made to me by the president of the New York Power Authority, that the United Kingdom is now seen as a world leader in electricity supply, which was not the case before privatisation?

Mr. Wakeham: The electricity supply system that we have devised is regarded with admiration and envy in the west as well as in the old iron curtain countries. The United Kingdom's flexible approach to marketing and competition serves as a model for the whole world.

Mr. Hardy: Referring to the point made by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), which the Secretary of State echoed, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to accept that, although British Coal has secured splendid improvements in productivity, the coalfield communities have paid a vicious price in terms of their changing economy and environment?

Has British Coal paid its electricity bill? Perhaps the Secretary of State can explain why, for the first time in modern history, collieries in South Yorkshire found themselves without electricity, when men were travelling up the shaft in the pit cage?

Mr. Wakeham: The question whether British Coal has paid its electricity bill is for its management. I have no doubt that the bill has been paid and that the management has negotiated good supplies with the regional electricity companies. Last weekend saw some of the worst weather ever experienced. That is certainly true of north Nottinghamshire, as I know from the chairman of the electricity board there. But it ill behoves the hon. Gentleman continually to snipe at the work force that is trying to put things right.

Mr. Trimble: Does the Secretary of State appreciate the need for a truly national energy policy—one that ensures that all parts of the kingdom have access to national fuel and energy resources? I refer not just to the provision of oil and gas to Northern Ireland but to an electricity interconnector. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the need to ensure that not only private consumers but commerce and industry in Northern Ireland are not penalised by high energy prices?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not have responsibility for the regime in Northern Ireland, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has proposals for improving the position there. In privatising the electricity industry in England and Wales, we have borne in mind the principle that while interconnectors can certainly be built, they must be commercially justifiable.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend promise the House that part of his long-term strategy will be the early privatisation of the coal industry—which would be popular with customers, miners and taxpayers? Does he agree that the only contribution of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to a national long-term energy strategy is hot air?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the Secretary of State.

Mr. Wakeham: I must disagree. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) represents the mining industry vigorously in the House. I mostly disagree with what he has to say, but no one could say that he has no knowledge of the subject, or that he does not express his views with vigour. He will not like what I am going to say next—the Government are committed to the privatisation of the coal industry, although not until after the next election.

Mr. Barron: Does the Minister recognise that there is a difference between diversity of supply and security of supply? Does he think that anyone will be any happier after the events of this weekend when, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned, many coalminers were left underground? Many in my constituency were also left underground for hours on Friday night. I refer to the fact that the duty to supply electricity to consumers has been taken away.

Mr. Wakeham: That is a misunderstanding of the arrangements. Security of supply is now protected by arrangements which the regional electricity companies have to enter into, the contracts that they have to enter into and the terms of their licences.

Mr. Barron: No.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman misunderstood the position in the past and he misunderstands it now. The regional electricity companies have an obligation to enter into contracts for the adequate supply of electricity, under the terms of their licences. If they do not contract for enough, they will have to go into the market to buy it, and it will be very expensive.

Renewable Energy

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives he intends to take on energy production from renewable sources.

Mr. Moynihan: Provisions under the non-fossil fuel obligation have already provided a substantial boost to renewables development, and further orders will be brought forward during the 1990s. My Department's research and development budget for renewables is due to increase next year by about 20 per cent., to more than £24 million.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that if the ancestor of the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) tried to build a windmill today, he would find it almost impossible because of obstacles placed in his way by the Government, as the people developing Mynydd Cemaes in mid-Wales are finding? Why have the Government not applied to the EC for continuing favoured treatment for renewables after 1998? Do they still not realise the enormous potential of renewables to

provide us with energy from sources which are free, British, benign to the human habitat and eternal in their duration?

Mr. Moynihan: The grandfather of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) would also not have had the opportunity to benefit from the substantial Government programme of assistance for the development of wind energy. The United Kingdom wind energy research and development programme is second to none. The hon. Gentleman refers to difficulties faced by those putting forward applications, but they are simply the difficulties of bringing forward planning proposals for consideration by local councils. I hope that many of those proposals come into play, not least because we want to ensure that there is a sound commercial base for the exploitation of wind energy in this country. We need to ensure that we have appropriate wind farms in different places to test their economic viability and environmental acceptability.

Mr. Aitken: In relation to my hon. Friend's remarks about the need for a sound commercial basis for renewable energy sources, will he take note of the disappointing results produced by Britain's largest wind generator, situated in Richborough in my constituency, which produces electricity at a cost of well over 10p per kilowatt, compared with the cost of generating electricity from oil which is approximately a quarter of that sum? Is not that some indication of the fact that some of the heady words about wind power may be only so much hot air?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend will perhaps have taken note of the fact that whenever I have referred to wind power and its environmental acceptability, I have also emphasised the importance of ensuring that it is economic. One of the important lessons learnt in the past few years is that if we move to smaller wind farms—a number of smaller wind farms were contracted under the first round of the non-fossil fuel obligation—we hope that they will be more economically competitive. We have a long way to go. I am undoubtedly of the view that putting research and development and support behind separate wind trials next year under the NFFO will assist us to make them economically competitive as well as environmentally acceptable.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would not it be a very enlightened move if British Nuclear Fuels were to invest some of its considerable research and development personnel in this area? Would not that help to green the reputation of British Nuclear Fuels' development?

Mr. Moynihan: I have never seen any reason why expenditure on renewables research and development should bear any proportional relationship to nuclear expenditure. I recognise, however, that we need top-quality manpower, researchers and scientists to embark on wind energy research and development projects, and those men we have.

Combined Cycle Gas Turbine

12. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations his Department has received regarding proposals by National Power and PowerGen to generate electricity using the combined cycle gas turbine.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations regarding applications by National Power and PowerGen for his consent to construct and operate individual CCGT stations.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister believe that a national limit should be fixed for the amount of gas that can be used to generate electricity? Does he see any possibility of British Gas itself being able to generate electricity using this system?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The use of fuels is a matter for the commercial judgment of the generators. There are substantial reserves of gas in the North sea and it is perfectly acceptable for some of that to be used to generate electricity, but a large share of the British energy market will continue to be provided by the burning of coal.

Electricity Privatisation

13. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of PowerGen to discuss privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of PowerGen regularly to discuss all aspects of PowerGen's business.

Mr. Haynes: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about the miners and the mining industry, and the wonderful contribution that they are making to meet the energy requirements of the nation. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there are two chairmen—the chairman of PowerGen, who is leaving us in a few months, and the chairman of National Power, who has already gone—and will he think seriously about the amount of compensation paid to those two people? Will he take that into consideration when miners lose their jobs in the pits due to privatisation of the electricity industry and will it have a knock-on effect so that miners who are made redundant can enjoy like compensation?

Mr. Wakeham: As I have already said, the great improvement in productivity in the mines has been brought about in part by the number of redundancies that we have made, but all those redundancies have been made on a voluntary basis. I hope that that basis can continue, but that is a matter for British Coal and the workers concerned, and the levels of compensation are matters to be negotiated between them—as, of course, is the question of compensation paid to the chairman of a nationalised industry or Government company when he retires. The Government have always worked on such a basis—we seek to find a sum equivalent to the amount that would be awarded if the matter went to court.

Mr. McCartney: There is almost a conspiracy of silence in the Government about the effect on the coalfield communities of the purchasing policies of companies such as PowerGen and National Power. Those communities are experiencing thousands upon thousands of job losses, and a dislocation of environmental and economic well-bing. What steps will the Government take to assist local authorities and the private sector to rebuild and re-establish those communities?

This winter, in my constituency, hundreds of miners are being made redundant, and thousands have already been made redundant. How long will it be before our

communities have been bled dry on the altar of privatisation? The Government cannot continue to wash their hands of the matter. When will the Minister intervene to provide resources for the rebuilding of our shattered communities?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman expresses views which are strong but not necessarily accurate. Far from hiding a light under a bushel, on the day contracts were negotiated between British Coal and the generators I came to the House and announced the details—I was very proud of what had been achieved by British Coal and by the generating industry. I also paid considerable tribute to the way in which British Coal and its work force had adapted to the new situation. There has been a vast improvement in productivity—to which I would expect the hon. Gentleman to give credit, rather than making carping remarks—and the redundancies that have been made have all been on a voluntary basis, for which we should all be grateful.

Mr. Morgan: I have heard the words "successful privatisation" reiterated so often by the lemming tendency on the Conservative Benches that I almost expected to see the Secretary of State for Energy dressed in his Santa Claus uniform. He obviously believes that a major tax cut for the yuppy classes has come early this year in the form of privatisation, in time for them to buy their Christmas presents. It has been described, not by me but by the Lex column of the *Financial Times* this morning, as a fraud on the taxpayer. When the Secretary of State privatises the generators next February or March, will he have learnt anything? Does he consider that when he privatises the generators it will be necessary to discount them by 40 per cent. and put them on a running yield of more than 30 per cent., thus privatising our major national assets at junk bond prices?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman does not understand these matters. That is evident from the way in which he put his question. The price being placed on the 12 electricity companies is a proper price, based on the value of expected future earnings and dividends.

Mr. Morgan: What about fraud?

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman is seriously interested in fraud, I could answer his question, but the way in which he prefaced it suggests that he knows very little about fraud. There is of course the question of fraud. We are very careful about fraud and take it very seriously indeed. We have developed highly sophisticated methods to detect fraud. We have learnt lessons from the previous flotations. That may come as news to the hon. Gentleman, who seems to leak information of a partial sort to the newspapers. I would not disclose publicly the methods used to detect fraud, as it might assist criminals.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Transport and Hospitality

24. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much has been spent by his office in 1990 on official transport and hospitality.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Chris Patten): In the current financial year my office has spent £28,779 on official transport and hospitality.

Mr. Banks: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on becoming his master's voice in the Conservative party. The figure that he has just given is absolutely scandalous. Taxpayers' money is being used to subsidise the Conservative party. That is what it is; it is a non-Government job. If the Labour party were to suggest that, one can imagine the outrage in the country. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he might obviate some of the more obvious public criticism of this waste of taxpayers' money if, as chairman of the Conservative party, he were to go to Cheltenham and expel the disgusting racists in the Conservative association there and if he would also end the discriminatory employment practices at Conservative central office?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman will doubtless have read in the newspapers the remarks that I have made about Cheltenham. As for his observations about expenses, he should not assume that the way in which he may have behaved as chairman of the Greater London council is the way in which Ministers behave. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I make a contribution to the Government as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, although intense personal modesty constrains me from setting out exactly what it might be.

Dr. Cunningham: Are we to believe that a Cabinet—including the right hon. Gentleman, whom I congratulate on taking up his new office and retaining his seat in the Cabinet—able to bring about the almost instantaneous resignation of one of the most powerful Prime Ministers this century is incapable of getting rid of a few despicable racists in the Tory party in Cheltenham?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we do not hold a membership list at Conservative central office. As I have already made clear, I would not wish to work shoulder to shoulder with people such as the man to whom the hon. Gentleman referred.

Opencast Mining

26. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether in his capacity as Chancellor he has received any representations arising from opencast mining being undertaken in Lancashire under interim development orders.

Mr. Chris Patten: None, Sir.

Mr. Pike: When the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster next visits the county, will he visit Facit and Britannia quarries in Bacup, where he will be appalled at the destruction taking place? Will he use every power that he has to ensure that the appropriate Minister introduces early legislation to stop that destruction and devastation taking place?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman might anticipate, I expect to make several visits to the county in the immediate and longer-term future. As for the planning issue that he raises, I am sure that he will be aware that in a White Paper on the environment, produced under a previous Secretary of State for the Environment, we said that we intend to review the operation of the Town and

Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981, which will include a review of interim development orders. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. That is why the review is important.

Mr. Mans: When my right hon. Friend next visits Lancashire to look at opencast mining, will he take the opportunity to arrange a meeting with the leader of Labour-controlled Lancashire county council to discuss the state of social services in the county and, in particular, of residential homes, many of which are of a lower standard than those in the private sector?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about opencast mines.

Mr. Mans: In Lancashire.

Mr. Speaker: In Lancashire, yes.

Mr. Patten: So far as I know, there are no opencast mines on the Duchy's property—I do not think that there are any social services establishments, either—but I take seriously what my hon. Friend says. I hope to have an opportunity to point out to the leader of the Labour-controlled county council how the community charge is far too high because of the activities of the Labour group and how, alas, services do not seem to be as splendid as they should be, given the amount of money that the community charge payer pays for them.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Cathedrals

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Commissioners have made about the Government's proposal that the Department of the Environment will assist with the maintenance of cathedrals.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): None, Sir, because, while they welcome the Government's proposal, the Commissioners have no direct responsibility for the maintenance of cathedrals. The primary duty of the Commissioners is the support of the full-time parochial ministry of the Church of England, in service and retirement, and the bulk of their income is used for that purpose.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this extra money means that there will be much less pressure on cathedrals to sell their historic treasures? It demonstrates the Government's concern for the environment and for our cultural heritage, and perhaps a bouquet should go to the right hon. Gentleman who was responsible for getting the money from the Treasury.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's observations. The £11·5 million to be spent over the next three years by the Government and by the Secretary of State for the Environment, in particular, is very welcome, although the Church must make up more than £70 million to contribute to that source. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy was an important and potent force in securing that welcome financial input from the Government and we are grateful for his help.

Mr. Frank Field: When the right hon. Gentleman is considering land that the Commissioners may sell—he rightly said that the proceeds of those sales are used to pay clergy salaries—will he consider the Commissioners' duty in relation to employment levels in different parts of the country? If it does not cause the Commissioners great expense, should not they withdraw land from areas of high employment so that Government jobs in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food can go to areas of high unemployment such as the one that I represent?

Mr. Alison: I naturally have much sympathy for the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, particularly in regard to the Birkenhead constituency and Merseyside, where developments that increase employment might take place. The initiative for planning applications for the use of Church Commission land must come initially from the person or unit wishing to develop land. If the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food central scientific laboratory is projected to be at a particular locality in, say, North Yorkshire, the only way in which the Commission could stop it would be by refusing to sell the land, but the Ministry might then compulsorily purchase it. However, I personally will write to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food drawing his attention to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the central scientific laboratory might be located away from North Yorkshire and see what happens.

Mr. Latham: I warmly welcome the fact that Government money is available to preserve the matchless heritage of our historic cathedrals, which are famous throughout the world. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is no diminution in the money available for English Heritage to help historic parish churches, many of which are in a serious state?

Mr. Alison: I take careful note of my hon. Friend's point. The sums available to English Heritage through the Government have been steadily increasing and are at an all-time high in the current financial year.

Church Commission (Assets)

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what was the value of the assets of the Church Commission at their latest valuation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: As at 31 December 1989, the Church Commissioners' total assets were valued at £3,082 million, as shown in that year's annual report, of which I think my hon. Friend has a copy.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the Church Commissioners on their successful investment policies over the past few years, which have benefited clergy through higher salaries and stipends? May I hope that they will do as well in coming years as they have done in recent years?

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reference to the successful investment policies that the Church Commissioners have been carrying out. We have more than kept ahead of inflation in terms of stipends and retirement pension levels. However, the next few years look like being a period of greater constraint on Church

Commissioners resources. To keep as well ahead of inflation as we have in the past will be quite a tough operation. It is right to warn that colder economic winds are blowing. As always, however, we shall do our best to maintain clergy stipends and pensions at the highest possible level.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Former Prime Ministers

30. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what special arrangements are made in the House for the accommodation of former Prime Ministers.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Members' rooms within the Palace and parliamentary outbuildings are allocated by the Government and Opposition parties' Whips on behalf of the Services Committee. Any special arrangements required are considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

Mr. Banks: As there will be three ex-Prime Ministers in the House of Commons after the next general election perhaps we should have a special badge made for them —with crossed daggers on a blood-red background. To save the last Prime Minister expending a reported £9·5 million of her money to provide offices and a home for herself, could we offer her a suite of offices in county hall, which is empty? I am sure that she would be suitably happy there. We could all move over there as well. Now that the right hon. Lady has gone, will the right hon. Gentleman consider using county hall for offices for Members of Parliament?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will be disappointed in respect of the first part of his question because he will find that things will not turn out as he suggests. As for the rest of his question, I have nothing to add to what the hon. Gentleman was told in a reply that he received from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 23 November.

Sir Anthony Grant: Before my right hon. Friend gets too fussed about the accommodation of former Prime Ministers, will he apply his mind to the accommodation of the present Prime Minister? Will he have a word with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and point out that, although we are enormously proud that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister resides in Cambridgeshire, there is a substantial additional security cost to be borne by the poor old Cambridgeshire police?

Mr. MacGregor: The question is about accommodation in the House, which is rather different, but I will pass on my hon. Friend's remarks to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Middle East War

31. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to establish a Select Committee to examine the likely ecological consequences of a war in the middle east.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Leader of the House sensitive to the fact that some of his parliamentary colleagues look enviously across the Atlantic at Senator Sam Nunn and his committee? In circumstances in which the Front Benches may basically agree, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the House of Commons goes about its business in a desultory fashion? For example, when General Powell came to Committee Room 14, he talked about a possible use of nuclear weapons, fire trenches and ghastly ecological consequences from carbon dioxide emissions. Should not that subject be investigated by a Select Committee which sits at least as often as the American select committee?

Mr. MacGregor: There have been several statements and questions on these matters in the past few weeks and we shall have a further opportunity to debate them fully tomorrow. I do not think that there is a case for establishing a special Select Committee to consider that question.

Mr. Latham: Why do we need a Select Committee when every hon. Member knows perfectly well that the way for such ecological difficulties to be avoided is for Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait immediately?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Select Committees

32. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration he has given to the recommendations of the Procedure Committee report on Select Committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I am considering the recommendations made by the Committee and will make a statement in due course.

Mr. Wallace: It will come as no surprise to the Lord President if I draw his attention to paragraph 271 of the Select Committee report, which states that the House is entitled to look to him to try to find a solution to the non-establishment of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which is in contravention of our Standing Orders. What steps has the right hon. Gentleman taken to consult the Opposition parties to try to reach a compromise and find a way of doing something that is long overdue?

Mr. MacGregor: I have been considering the matter, although, as I have told the House, I find it difficult to envisage a way forward in the current Session. I have recently had discussions with one of the Opposition parties.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Many of us will have noted from *Hansard* that the Lord President had to attend the House—having cancelled constituency business—on Friday, when one or two London Members dropped in to try to change the procedures of the House to enable them to work from 9 am to 5 pm so that they can see their constituents in the evening and have the weekends off. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that many of us regard our existing hours as sensible and reasonable?

Mr. MacGregor: I have made it clear that I am prepared to examine the whole question of procedure and hours, although I am well aware of the difficulties of achieving change. My hon. Friend has made a good point.

In considering these matters, one must take into account the interests of all Members of the House from all backgrounds—in particular, the difficulties of hon. Members who represent constituencies a long way from Westminster. All those issues will have to be addressed.

Mr. Madden: What plans does the Lord President have to tackle the vexed question of the Chairmen of several Select Committees holding a range of private commercial interests which impinge directly on their Committees' activities? Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that that creates the opportunity for abuse and may give rise to conflicts of interest, and that it is a scandal which is long overdue for attention?

Mr. MacGregor: Without accepting any of what the hon. Gentleman has said, I remind him that the matter is being looked at by a particular Committee at the moment.

Procedural Changes

33. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what discussions he has had regarding procedural changes for the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have had a number of discussions relating to procedural change. I am always willing to receive and consider ideas for improvement in our procedures.

Mr. Skinner: If we change our hours of work in this place, will the Lord President consider the early-daymotion with an amendment carrying many hon. Members' signatures suggesting that any system of payment should be based on the number of hours worked and that we should clock on and clock off as happens outside? Will the right hon. Gentleman also bear it in mind that it would not be a bad idea to have full-time Members of Parliament, as 19 Tory ex-Cabinet Ministers now hold 59 directorships between them?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that in the House the number of hours worked or clocking on and off bear any relation to effectiveness. I sometimes think that the hon. Gentleman is a Standing Committee in himself, but I am not sure that he is any longer capable of amendment or procedural change. Such matters must also be taken into account in considering effectiveness.

Dr. Cunningham: I thank the Leader of the House for making it clear at the outset of his tenure of office that he is willing to have a fundamental review of the hours worked in the House, a review which many of us believe is long overdue. I am ready to work constructively with the Leader of the House to see how change can be brought about and to create a consensus. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this House sits for far longer than almost any other western legislature, but we are not conspicuously better at producing good legislation, as the poll tax Bill makes clear?

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's non-politically contentious point, I am grateful to him for the way in which he is approaching the matter and for his offer of co-operation. I certainly hope to work with him when considering procedures and hours. On a slightly wider point, if we are to be effective, it is important that we have the co-operation of all hon. Members. So often, the understandable willingness to use the rules in any way possible negates the objective of changes that are made.

Members' Cafeteria

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what suggestions from the suggestions book in the Members' Cafeteria have been implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Since the House returned from the summer recess, six comments of substance have been entered in the Members Cafeteria comments book. Three related to the rule on smoking and three asked for the provision of certain dishes or foodstuffs.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the inauguration of the suggestions books. Will he assure the House that a positive view will be taken of the suggestions and, in particular, that when more rice pudding is asked for, it might be allowed?

Mr. MacGregor: I had a suspicion that my hon. Friend might ask that question. I can assure him that special efforts have been taken to ensure that it is available in large quantities today.

Severe Weather

3.31 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the disruption of essential services over the weekend as a result of the severe weather conditions.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The present situation is that all main roads and railway lines are usable, some requiring special care. Some minor roads are blocked. Train services are near normal on most routes and airports and seaports are operating normally.

At present some 380,000 customers are without an electricity supply. Most reconnections should be achieved today or tomorrow, but it will take longer in some isolated areas. Some 500,000 people are still without piped water. Supplies have already been restored to 1 million people and most of those still without a supply will be reconnected today. Nearly all the telephone subscribers who lost their supplies have been reconnected.

The emergency services in all areas have been working flat out and the House will want to join me in paying tribute to their dedication and efficiency. The armed forces assisted in a number of areas and their work has contributed a great deal to what has been achieved. Much of the work was undertaken by the Territorial Army, proving the worth of our volunteers once again.

The Met Office has said that severe weather is unlikely to recur during the rest of this week. We may therefore hope that repair work can proceed without general interruption. In the meantime, I urge everyone in the worst-affected areas to avoid travel unless that is absolutely necessary.

Unduly harsh weather always presents us with new problems and I shall be considering with my colleagues any lessons that should be learnt from the events of the weekend. I hope that hon. Members will bear it in mind that it was the most severe blizzard suffered in this country so early in the winter for a number of years. The emergency services performed valiantly and demonstrated once again the quality of the public services on which we can rely in such emergencies.

Mr. Hattersley: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his first appearance in the House as Home Secretary.

I should like to express Opposition Members' condolences to the relatives of those who died as a result of the weekend's severe weather, our sympathy to those who were injured or lost property and our gratitude to the emergency services, many other public bodies and private individuals who worked so valiantly—I agree with the word used by the Home Secretary—during the past 36 to 48 hours.

The Home Secretary will know that there is a feeling of surprise that, despite its brief severity, such a storm should have caused such continuous disruption. In the light of that, I shall ask the right hon. Gentleman some specific questions.

Is there still national co-ordination of emergency services? When, for instance, it was discovered that drivers had been stranded in some areas for 12 hours of more, was additional assistance made available by a central co-ordinating authority? Will the Home Secretary make it unequivocally clear where the legal responsibility lies for clearing motorways, increasingly the arteries of the nation? Can it possibly be left to the varying judgments of financially hard-pressed local authorities?

Does the Home Secretary agree that, in the conditions that we experienced on Saturday and Sunday, it is essential, for safety reasons among other things, to keep railways open? Was British Rail properly prepared? Is it, for example, reasonable that it should possess only two mechanical snow ploughs to clear more than 10,000 miles of track?

Why were some public services, particularly in the west midlands, so vulnerable? How is it that in some areas there had been no water for more than a day? Have water authorities no contingency plans for cuts in electricity, which we are told was the cause of the breakdown in water supplies?

Two questions on policy are directly related to the Government. Since the storm incurred costs on some local authorities that are beyond any reasonable contingency provision, what help is to be provided by central Government? What can the Home Secretary tell us about the thousands of homeless who, these days, sleep in the streets and shop doorways? Why, in particular, were the three special severe weather night shelters, which the Government announced only a few weeks ago would be available in London, not opened on Saturday and Sunday evenings? As it seems that hard-hit pensioners will not qualify for the special cold weather payment, what will the Government do to help them?

Mr. Baker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the helpful tenor of his questions. I understand from the chief constable of Nottinghamshire that Mr. Raymond Williams's car was one of many that were trapped in the Mansfield area and that Mr. Williams and a friend were inside the car. He was found dead at 2 pm on Saturday, but his passenger survived. The whole House will want to extend sympathy to Mr. Williams's family. I also pay tribute not only to the services but to individuals who made considerable efforts over the past weekend to overcome the severe weather.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about local and national responsibilities in such emergencies. On 15 June 1989, one of my predecessors made an announcement to the House. After a review of emergency services and the responsibilities of local authorities and others, one conclusion was that the prime responsibility for handling certain disasters should remain at local level, where resources and expertise are to be found and where mutual aid arrangements exist, for example, between neighbouring emergency services. I was in touch with various colleagues yesterday to determine whether extra help had to be provided. [HON. MEMBERS: "It was not."] There was a great deal of co-ordination between the various emergency services and between emergency services in some of the private sector, particularly in the Thames valley.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has announced that he will review current arrangements for dealing with sudden weather crises, concentrating on the movement of passengers and freight, and he will consider comparable countries and report early in the new year. British Rail suspended services late on Saturday afternoon. It was rather wise to do that because

it meant that trains were not isolated in remote areas and were kept at stations. British Rail has responded vigorously and well to the crisis and restored services on virtually all lines today.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about water supplies. The disruption of water supplies was nearly always due to the failure of electricity supplies. That was not due to the failure of the auxiliary pumping equipment; It was due to the water authorities' failure to get through to the remote pumping stations to set off the auxiliary generators. Great efforts are being made today to reconnect services.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about what is known as the Bellwin scheme, under which the Government provide financial assistance towards emergency costs under arrangements that were agreed in 1982. The scheme is activated at Ministers' discretion when weather conditions are clearly exceptional and when, as a result, local authorities are likely to incur expenditure. When the scheme is activated, grant is paid to cover 85 per cent. of expenditure over a threshold that is currently £2 per charge payer. As the House knows, the scheme was activated in 1987 following the hurricane and again earlier this year following the severe winter storms. It is too early to know whether it will be activated this time.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asked me about hostels in London and about the cold weather payments. Under what is called the severe weather initiative, various premises are made available, mainly in the centre of London, for the homeless. That scheme is triggered when the temperature has been below zero for three days. The cold weather payments are regulations that were agreed and announced a long time ago. The temperature must be at or below zero for seven days before the scheme is activated. The payments are £5 for each pensioner on income support and for parents of young children who are also on income support.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): As a result of the serious blockages on the M6 in a north-westerly direction, which lasted well into yesterday evening, will my right hon. Friend undertake to inquire into the role played by heavy goods vehicles in causing that blockage? Will he join me and other hon. Members in congratulating the West Midlands police and other forces on all that they were trying to do to rescue people and to bring help to both drivers and passenger vehicles in the area? I know about that from my own experience and wish to express my personal gratitude for all that the police did for myself and my family. However, I was concerned—I am sure that other hon. Members will also be concerned —to see row upon row of heavy goods vehicles that were three abreast on that stretch of motorway, including in the fast lane, for mile after mile after mile. There was simply no way in which the snow ploughs could even get through. The motorway was totally blocked.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Robert Wareing—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I was deflected. We had better have the answer first.

Mr. Baker: I spoke earlier today to the chief constable of the West Midlands police. He commented that, in his judgment, the weather warning was good, the road gritting was good, but the snow was much heavier and thicker than had been expected, affecting especially the M6, the M5 and the M42. The chief constable had his vehicles out on the road at a very early stage, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) must have noticed because he was involved, lorries jack-knifed and caused blockages. Many vehicles were abandoned in the area and between 2,000 and 3,000 people had to be housed at the NEC overnight. I understand from the chief constable that about 100 vehicles are still abandoned. He wanted me to stress that he had received considerable help from Rover, which lent the West Midlands police 18 four-wheel drive vehicles. I, too, thank Rover for that.

The chief constable also made an interesting comment, which I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will want to bear in mind in his review of such emergencies. He questioned whether, in severe and sudden bad weather, motorways in urban areas should be closed. That cannot be done in rural areas, but it might be helpful in an area such as the west midlands. Clearly, my right hon. and learned Friend will want to consider that.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): As one who survived 18 and a half hours on the M6 and M1 motorways, including 12 and a quarter hours in exactly the same place outside Birmingham, may I tell the Home Secretary that the Government's attitude is complacent? These are not new problems, as the Home Secretary suggested; they are old problems. What have the Government done to implement the 1979 report of the World Meteorological Organisation, which called for a proper national research programme into climate and weather conditions, or the 1986 report of the Technical Centre, which was financed by the Government, which called for a network of climatologists, economists and officials to plan resources for tackling such conditions? Is the matter simply to be left to free-market forces?

Mr. Baker: The Ministry of Defence, which has responsibility for the Meteorological Office, has reviewed its procedures. Certainly none of the police forces to which I have spoken today complained that there was not a sufficient lack of warning. There was a sufficient lack of warning.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): A sufficient lack of warning?

Mr. Baker: There was no lack of warning by the Met Office of what was about to happen. Like many people, I heard the news about the weather as I was driving around on Friday. There was good warning in this case and the Met Office should receive tribute for that. The chief constables of Thames Valley and of the West Midlands told me that they were surprised by the thickness and intensity of the snow, which added an unexpected factor.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): My right hon. Friend will be aware that North Yorkshire was particularly hard hit over the weekend and that several rural areas are still without electricity. Is not there a lesson to be learnt here? Buildings can be designed to withstand earthquakes, yet when we have storms, we have difficulty in maintaining our electricity supplies. More especially, will my right hon. Friend take steps to ensure that planning permission for petrol stations includes a condition that stations must be provided with back-up generators to supply petrol to motorists who would otherwise be stranded when such conditions occur and electricity is cut off?

Mr. Baker: I understand that my hon. Friend was almost killed in the severe weather at the weekend. I am glad that the tree did not fall on the room in which he was sleeping. The point that he raised is an interesting one, which I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I am told that the major roads in Yorkshire are all clear but some minor roads in the dales are still blocked. The A59 in the south part of Yorkshire is now clear.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I extend condolences to families who have been bereaved during the storms. I also extend our thanks and congratulations to the emergency services—not least the linesmen who put themselves at particular risk to restore power. What process is there to ensure that detailed meteorological and other warnings are transmitted to those who have to deal with conditions at local level? On what time scale are such warnings transferred? On that point, I noticed that several hours after the blizzards hit Cornwall and Devon, the BBC and ITV broadcast that there was no snow there. It seems that at least that communications route does not work. Can the Secretary of State tell the House on what time scale decisions on the Bellwin scheme will be taken?

Mr. Baker: On the time scale within which advice is made available, my Department alerted the fire services and the police to the weather news on Friday. The general public was kept informed by radio and television. That is inevitable and it is probably the best way of doing so.

It is too early to say whether payments will be made under the Bellwin scheme. Clearly, the matter will be of some concern to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. It usually takes some time to assess how much extra expenditure has been incurred. That will be the case in dealing with the problems at the weekend.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there was unnecessary chaos in the section of the M6 that leads to Corley service station on Saturday? I was stationary for 18 hours, fortunately in the company of my wife and with a certain amount of good Burton beer that I keep with me for emergencies. But there can be no excuse for the authorities not closing the M6 when they saw the trouble that was happening. The trouble had clearly begun a good hour or so before I joined the motorway. There was no gritting of any sort. There were no snowploughs.

I did not see a police officer for 15 hours, and when one arrived he had no idea what was happening. No attempt was made to release the traffic that had been travelling eastward towards the M1 to the entirely empty opposite side of the M6 until 2 am. That reveals a disgraceful lack of co-ordination among local authorities, the police and whoever else may be responsible. Will my right hon. Friend look into that? There are still hundreds of vehicles in the area. Goodness knows how many of those in them were diabetic, unwell or old, who had no access to lavatories and telephones. The whole thing was disgraceful. The shortcomings could be corrected if my right hon. Friend were to devote his attention to ensuring that there is no lack of co-ordination in future.

Mr. Baker: I shall draw the remarks of my hon. and learned Friend to the attention of the chief constables in the areas that he mentioned, including the way in which traffic was controlled. My hon. and learned Friend underlined the idea that was put to me earlier by a chief constable, which was that when those difficulties occur, consideration should be given to early closure of the motorways. I hasten to add that I refer to those in urban areas. It would be much more difficult to close those in more remote rural areas.

I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend's journey, with his wife, was necessary. The chief constable of Thames Valley has told me, however, that his officers dug out quite a few elderly people from their cars on Saturday. Those people, having seen that it was a snowy day, had gone out for a run.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Home Secretary investigate as a matter of some urgency a simple precaution? I, too, was stuck on the M6 for 10 or 12 hours on Saturday. I hasten to add that I was not in the car of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence). Had it not been for a group of young soldiers who were in two coaches, who, with aid of lorry drivers, rescued hundreds of motorists, and who received great thanks, matters would have been much worse. It was noticeable at junction 2 that there was an absence of any drawing vehicles to drag skidded lorries on to the slip road and out of the way. If that had been done, hundreds of motorists, some with young families, would have been released much earlier. Surely it is not a great difficulty to place rescue vehicles at motorway junctions.

Mr. Baker: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of police officers and of the local authorities concerned. A substantial number of snowploughs are available. I recall that about 280 are available for work on the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where were they?"] Hon. Members must appreciate that when there are severe weather conditions, one of the difficulties is physically getting the equipment to the right place. As I said, about 280 snowploughs are available. They are financed by the Department of Transport. Their purpose is to deal with the conditions that hon. Members have talked about on the main motorway network.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend pass on to the water authorities the suggestion that they should invest in generators so that in future water supplies are not cut off? In every theatre in the land, for example, there is an automatic switch from mains electricity to an auxiliary supply. Most people find it incomprehensible that the companies do not have such a system.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend will try to ascertain why people were blaming the failure to anticipate the intensity of the snowstorm. If it had been anticipated, would things have been different? Finally, perhaps some of our colleagues might consider using a train instead of driving. If their train had been stopped, it would not have remained stationary for 18 hours.

Mr. Baker: The best advice that one can give to anyone when severe weather is forecast is to stay at home and not to travel unless it is absolutely necessary to do so. Many people were travelling who were not in that position. As for the maintenance of motorways and trunk roads, about £24 million has been allocated for 1991. About 283 snowploughs and 23 snow blowers are dedicated to winter

maintenance on 1,600 miles of motorway. About £4·2 million has been provided in the 1990-91 budget for a continuing programme to renew the fleet of winter maintenance vehicles.

My hon. Friend also asked about auxiliary power supplies to water pumping stations. Some of those stations are extremely remote and they tend to have auxiliary generators, but in order to be used, they usually require someone to turn up. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] If they can be operated in a way other than that, I shall draw it to the attention of the water companies.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard to the business before the House. We have a statement after this, so I shall allow two more questions from each side and then we must move on.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is the Secretary of State aware of the havoc that the storm caused to the county of Leicestershire? Will he now please ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to state that he will give help to the county council and the city council because they have suffered from cuts in their rates, in their poll tax—call it what you will—and they have not got the money to cope? They need that money. Will he also ensure that an inquiry is made to discover why, because one substation broke down, thousands of people in the county were left without water? Why should they be like the ancient mariner, who had

"Water, water every where
Nor any drop to drink"?

Mr. Baker: I shall draw such points made by the hon. and learned Gentleman as I think worthy to the attention of the relevant authorities. So far we have not had any requests from local authorities, either district councils or county councils, for assistance and we shall have to see how the situation develops.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): May I say that I am astonished at the lack of foresight of the male Members of this establishment? Having heard that snow was forecast in large measure on Saturday and Sunday and knowing that the King's Cross Railways Bill revival motion, which is of considerable importance to my constituency, was on the Order Paper for today, I simply set my alarm for 3.30 am, left Lancaster at 3.45 and arrived here in good order.

Mr. Baker: I am sure that neither snow nor ice will deter my hon. Friend, who is a credit to us all.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider what he said about local authorities? As he said, the cold weather has come early, and it has been sharp and drastic. Local authorities such as my own, which has been poll tax-capped, have already reduced their budgets for road maintenance, particularly in rural areas. They have now been forced to make great inroads into that reduced budget. Would not it be helpful to contact all local authorities to assure them that they will not be poll tax-capped purely and simply for spending extra on coping with the weather conditions?

Mr. Baker: It depends entirely on how local authorities spend their money. We are talking about money in the budget for the current year and the necessary provisions will have been made. We have not had any requests from any local authorities at this stage. Such maintenance is one of the services that must be provided by those local authorities.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): My right hon. Friend is well aware that the whole of Nottinghamshire was without electricity for 24 hours and that the north of the county was without it for 48 hours—even now some villages are without electricity. I join my right hon. Friend in thanking the emergency services, especially the East Midlands electricity board workers who, while we were freezing in our homes, were freezing on the job in arctic conditions. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Stewart: May I also say how much we appreciate the work of the water authorities, but will my right hon. Friend remind them that, in future, we could do with standby generators to enable people to receive water at least?

Mr. Baker: I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to ensure that *Hansard* conveys what he meant, not what he said. My hon. Friend is certainly right to raise the issue of electricity supplies in the east midlands, the most severely affected region. The East Midlands electricity board has done a magnificent job in restoring the supply to many hundreds of thousands of its customers. It has had help from other regional companies, specialist contractors and the Army. I pay tribute to what they have done and I hope that the great majority of people will have their electricity supplies linked up today or tomorrow.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Uruguay Round)

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a statement on the general agreement on tariffs and trade Uruguay round negotiations that took place in Brussels last week.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture and I attended on behalf of the United Kingdom, together with Ministers from more than 100 countries, to negotiate a package of trade liberalising measures. That followed over four years of negotiations covering 15 subject areas. After four and a half days of discussion, it was decided that the negotiations could not be brought to a conclusion by the end of the week, but should be continued in Geneva, with a view to completing them early in the new year.

The United Kingdom has consistently argued for a substantial outcome to the round. The world economy is slowing down and urgently needs the non-inflationary stimulus that only a successful round can provide. As a major exporter, the United Kingdom stands to benefit more than most from open world markets and to lose more than most from the failure of the round. We want to see the GATT system maintained and strengthened as it provides the best guarantee against protectionism. We stand to gain in particular from extending the GATT system to the new areas of services, intellectual property and investment.

My right hon. Friend and I made strenuous efforts, both within the Community and outside, to urge flexibility on all sides, to discourage premature suspension of the talks and to help secure such progress as was made in the final stages of the week. The European Community was united in wanting to see a successful conclusion to the round. There was recognition that to achieve that, further movement was needed in all sectors, including agriculture. But the conference regrettably did not get down to serious negotiations on the crucial issue of agriculture until too late in the week to enable the process to be completed. The blame cannot be laid entirely at the door of any one participant. All needed to move. They started too late, and moved too little. We remain convinced that agreement is possible in this sector, given more time and the necessary political will from all participants.

I was disappointed that agreement was not reached in Brussels last week. But the round is not over. There is too much at stake to allow it to fail. The outlines of a substantial package emerged at Brussels. Impressive progress was made in many sectors—including some of the most difficult and complex, such as textiles and intellectual property. It would be a major achievement to bring agriculture and textiles under GATT disciplines for the first time and extend the GATT system to include services, intellectual property and investment. We can still achieve those aims.

What we need to do now is consolidate the progress that has already been made and to use the next few weeks to build on it. The United Kingdom will continue to play an active part in that. At the European Council next weekend, and during his visit to Washington later this month, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will press participants to show the necessary political will to resolve the outstanding issues and ensure an outcome from which the whole world will benefit.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): The failure to reach an agreement in the GATT round is serious and the only sign of hope is that there is, at least, a commitment to resume talks. Will the Secretary of State give us details on the likely timetable of resumed talks and a few more details about what discussions the Government will be involved in between now and when the talks begin? The Secretary of State mentioned the Prime Minister's likely involvement. Would not it have been advisable for the Prime Minister to be involved before now, for example by having urgent talks with Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand last week to try to avoid the breakdown that subsequently occurred?

Will the Secretary of State say more about the attitude taken by himself and his colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in the talks? We know that the Government and the Conservative party are badly split on Europe, with one faction trying to stand in splendid isolation and the other faction trying to be a loyal member of the club. However, the common agricultural policy is not the issue on which to be a loyal member of the club. We feel strongly that the Secretary of State should not support the CAP up to the hilt in the negotiations, but ought to argue for a change of attitude by the Community and in favour of fundamental reforms.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Community's agricultural offer of a 30 per cent. cut would in reality be only a 15 per cent. cut, given that 1986 was taken as the base year? Will the right hon. Gentleman say what base year the Government favour?

Why did the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, together with the Community, fail to table a precise figure on cuts in export subsidies—which cause the greatest problems for world trade? We are not against supporting a vital industry such as agriculture, but the present form of CAP policies is causing problems in world trade as a whole.

The Secretary of State made only a brief reference to the textile industry. Can he guarantee that, if textiles and clothing are brought under GATT rules, those rules will be strengthened to ensure fair trade? We are particularly anxious that they should include a strengthened safeguards clause, anti-dumping provisions, design and copyright protection and a means of opening hitherto closed markets to United Kingdom textile exporters.

If the talks do not resume, or if resumed negotiations fail, what will the Government's attitude be towards drawing up a new multi-fibre arrangement or renewed bilateral agreements?

We welcome the progress on services, but can the Secretary of State give more information about outstanding problems in that sector—particularly given its vital importance to the British economy?

The Secretary of State made no mention of developing countries and that was a remarkable omission. What action was taken in the GATT round to ensure that the poorest developing countries will not lose out? Also, is not it the case that many important issues were largely ignored in the four wasted years of the Uruguay round? I refer to, for example, the environmental aspects of world trade, which concern many right hon. and hon. Members, and social considerations, seeking to ensure that a trading

system emerges that does not rely on exploitation or appalling working conditions in the poorest countries. Those are, of course, huge issues and it may be argued that it will be difficult to introduce them into the negotiations at this late stage. However, will the Government at least press that future rounds take account of environmental and social considerations?

Meanwhile, the priority must be to break the deadlock. We urge the Government to make more determined efforts to bring about changes in the Community's attitude to agriculture in particular. By doing so, they will avoid the risk of an even deeper recession at home and prolonged recession throughout the world.

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the hon. Lady's recognition of the seriousness of the postponement and prolongation of the talks. She asked about the likely timetable. The British Government want the talks to resume as soon as possible, and we shall be discussing with Mr. Dunkel and others the means of achieving that. It has been suggested that the talks will resume in mid-January.

The hon. Lady asked also about further discussions. I will be urging in personal discussions and telephonically with our European partners an early resumption of the talks, and maximum flexibility when they do resume. I mentioned earlier that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be raising the matter at the European Council and at his meeting in Washington. The hon. Lady suggested that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should have arranged meetings with President Mitterrand and Herr Kohl. In fact, we were closely in touch with the French and German representatives and in our discussions with the Community we succeeded in securing flexibility in interpreting the Community offer. That possibility was always available to my right hon. Friend, should it have been needed.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) made a little joke about the alleged split in the Conservative party. I assume that she did that to cover up the difficulties that she clearly finds in her own party, not least on this issue.

The Government firmly believe in freedom of trade. We believe that Europe is based on greater freedom of trade. We are wholeheartedly behind the single market, the essence of which is the removal of barriers to trade at an even more advanced scale than that envisaged within the GATT round, and we argued strongly that our partners in Europe should be flexible on all fronts.

The hon. Lady urges me not to be loyal to the common agricultural policy. I am not sure in which camp, in the supposed divisions within the Conservative party, she places me. I am anxious to hear. We urged upon the Community a reformulation of proposals put forward on agriculture to ensure maximum flexibility and to enable us to meet the concerns of other parties within the GATT round, as far as possible. By and large, that message was taken, but, as I said in my statement, it was too little and too late.

The hon. Lady asked for confirmation that the 30 per cent. offer amounts in practice to only 15 per cent. She is correct in saying that the 30 per cent. dates from the beginning of the round. It was agreed at the mid-term talks that that should be the base starting date for cuts in subsidies. We naturally support the agreement reached then—it seems to be a sensible basis for putting forward offers for cuts and subsidies.

In most of the discussions held last week in Brussels, the pressure was not on the Community to increase the 30 per cent. figure, but to reformulate it in such a way as to assure other parties that it would feed through to a reduction in export subsidies, as well as a reduction in totals. That is something which we did support and advocate.

As regards textiles, I can confirm that progress was made. It is waiting to be finalised—since nothing is final in these rounds until everything is finalised—but progress was made on strengthened rules and disciplines and on greater market access for textiles. The worst outcome for the textile industry would be a total collapse of the GATT round. The present MFA ends in July 1991 and, until we agree, there is nothing to replace it. At present, an outline agreement for a transitional phase of about 10 years could result if we conclude the whole round successfully.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East asked about outstanding problems with services. In the early days of our discussions it was difficult to get any movement from the United States towards accepting that the most-favoured nation principle should extend to all areas, and that all services should be included within the framework agreement. Towards the end of the talks the United States took some steps towards that and we believe that we could have progressed further had the negotiations continued, and we may do so if they resume.

The hon. Lady also mentioned developing countries. I recognise the important part that they have played in these talks so far and their importance for a successful outcome. One of the contributions that the European Community made during the negotiations was to improve its offer on tropical products. That was partly a result of urging by this country and it was well received by the developing countries.

Conditions of employment in less-developed countries are primarily a matter for the countries themselves. If we exclude their products from our markets, we do little to benefit people in less-developed countries. Often, that is simply a hidden form of protectionism, which I do not believe that any Conservative Member would like us to resort to.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As we have had numerous debates on this matter, could hon. Members confine their questions to the breakdown of talks and not mention issues which have been debated previously?

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend prevail on the Leader of the House to find time for an early debate on the breakdown of the GATT negotiations, as that is a serious and timely matter? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the breakdown of these talks is primarily due to the common agricultural policy, the worst feature of which are export subsidies, which constitute an abuse to the rest of the world and to trade with the rest of the world? Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether he believes that, apart from ourselves, the Community has the political will, of which he spoke earlier, to bring about a satisfactory renegotiation of the common agricultural policy so that the GATT negotiations can continue?

Mr. Lilley: I will certainly convey to our right hon. Friend the Leader of the House my hon. Friend's point about the importance of an early debate on the subject. I

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do not think that the breakdown of the talks can be attributed to one party exclusively. I was implicitly critical of those who were slow to move and offer concessions and whose concessions were not great enough. In the course of the week, however, the Community did offer to adopt a more flexible stance—in particular, to try to satisfy the concerns of others about export subsidies, a subject which, as my hon. Friend rightly says, is central to the success or failure of the round. We shall continue to press that point.

I also pointed out to the one or two Community members that were not averse to a suspension of the talks that any such suspension would probably increase the cost of success in the future, as everyone would have to make additional concessions to purchase a resumption of negotiations and, once they had been resumed, further concessions would be in order. I suggested that those who were most willing to countenance a breakdown should perhaps be most forthcoming in making concessions.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is a really appalling example of the dangers to world trade, and to producers in both developing and developed countries, of what can be described only as short-sighted European protectionism. Indeed, it is the worst possible example in relation to agricultural policy and agricultural trade.

The Secretary of State will have to accept that he has no power in this regard, as agricultural and trade policies have been handed over to the Commission and the Community for the past, heaven knows, 17 years. Will he at least ensure, however, that the matter is raised and discussed in the European Council meeting later this week? Will he also raise the whole question of agricultural policy, under the heading "subsidiarity", in the political union talks, so that we can discuss seriously the undoubted benefits of leaving to the European Community no further part of agricultural policy that ought to be resumed under national control?

Mr. Lilley: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the role played by Community member states is different from that played by other countries that participate directly in the negotiations. We negotiate through the Commission and empower it, broadly, to negotiate on our behalf.

I agree that it is something of a paradox that countries whose Heads of Government seem most willing, in principle, to hand over sovereignty to the Community seem to send to the negotiations Ministers who are most reluctant to empower the Commission to look after their national interests and who seem anxious to claw back control over the Commission. That, however, is one of the rich paradoxes of Community life.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): May I ask my right hon. Friend not to pay too much attention to the comments made by the "Euro-mats" on the Labour Front Bench? They, of course, would limply agree with anything that was the edict of Brussels, and therefore have no standing whatever in these matters.

More to the point, had my right hon. Friend been negotiating with full negotiating powers on behalf of the British Government, would his policy have been in any way different from that with which he was compelled to go along in Brussels last week?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that, in that happy circumstance, success would have ensued. It is only fair to point out, however, that in general the United Kingdom was offering strong support to the Commissioners who were negotiating on our behalf and seeking to give them the maximum leeway in the broad negotiating envelope that we had developed, so that they could reach agreement with the other side rather than placing obstacles in their way and shackles on their freedom of negotiating power.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I press the Secretary of State on the question of textiles? It is difficult to grasp the detail. I should be obliged if he would say a word about the linkage between strengthened rules and disciplines and access to third countries' markets. It might be helpful to put a draft of the text in the Library, so that hon. Members can see for themselves what has been at least tentatively agreed.

In the event of no agreement being reached by July 1991, if the MFA flies off, will that mean no controls after that date, and does the same apply to bilateral agreements that go beyond July 1991?

Mr. Lilley: To respond to the hon. Gentleman's last question, if there were no successful outcome to the round —I hope very much that there will be—the CAP would terminate automatically—[HON. MEMBERS: "CAP?"] I am sorry, the multi-fibre arrangement: that was wishful thinking. The MFA will lapse automatically at the end of July. Textiles will then automatically be treated in the same way as other goods. Bilateral arrangements are largely outlawed under the ordinary GATT agreements. GATT's purpose is to try to phase out and do without such things. I shall try to put any papers that are available in the Library for hon. Members to peruse, though some of them are opaque and include many square bracket entries where agreement has yet to be reached.

On textiles generally, we believe that considerable progress has been made in securing intellectual property rights, which will be of benefit to textiles in outlawing piracy of designs, and so on. That will come into effect before the full phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement. There should be increased access to overseas markets through tariff reductions and the removal of non-tariff barriers. There should be an improved safeguard mechanism, and other rules and disciplines will come into effect well before the phasing out of the MFA—*[Interruption.]* Well, it does not need to be a condition. It will be there, before the phasing out of the MFA.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Given that my right hon. Friend has already referred to the fact that some of the European Community delegates to the talks seemed to be remarkably unwilling to allow the Commission to negotiate on their behalf, does he consider that that might have some interesting ramifications when one takes into account the proposed European central bank?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It was an interesting experience to participate in last week's negotiations. It is hard to believe that those who are so reluctant to concede sovereignty on a matter which, in principle, has been within the Community's competence for the past two or three decades would be willing to hand over monetary policy to a truly independent central bank.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the Minister accept that it comes as no surprise to

those of us who have been concerned about the detail and the political framework of the common agricultural policy for a number of years that the talks should have broken down, partly on the basis of failure to reach agreement on a common CAP position between the Community and the other participants? Does he also accept that, in a sense, the European Community brought about the breakdown because of its failure to renegotiate the framework of its CAP? Those of us who share the Minister's view about export subsidies are equally concerned about establishing a framework that will maintain agricultural support in terms of income, environmental and landscape objectives and also the food production objectives of the common agricultural policy. Will the Minister initiate such an attempt within the Community?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is attending a meeting of the Community's Agriculture Council. Doubtless the member states will consider the consequences of the temporary suspension of the round. Such implications as those that the hon. Gentleman raises will be considered. I still think that it is wrong, however, to attribute the breakdown of the talks entirely to the Community or entirely to the common agricultural policy. Everyone must take their share of the blame. Many of the parties were reluctant to make concessions until too late in the week. When the Community showed flexibility, others were unwilling to recognise that it was making movement. There is only limited freedom of action for the Community, given the need to provide some sustenance of farmers' incomes.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that the European trade Ministers gave sufficient flexibility to the Commission to reach agreement? Will he confirm that he believes that if the negotiations had continued there could have been a settlement? Will he also confirm that the Government's policy is still that if subsidies to farmers, who face very difficult circumstances, are cut off, there will be adequate compensation for them?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, I believe that we allowed our negotiators considerable flexibility. Had the talks continued and we were arguing against suspension, it might have been possible for other members to draw out that flexibility and to achieve concessions valuable to themselves and acceptable to the Community. It will probably now require greater flexibility by the Community and everyone else to resume negotiations and to bring them to a successful conclusion early in the new year. We shall have to show greater flexibility than if we had concluded negotiations this week.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that hon. Members on both sides of the House have spotted the common agricultural policy as the problem because that policy is predicated on a political ratchet: first, the decoupling of taxes from control and, secondly, the fact that majority qualified voting has been in operation for 17 years makes it difficult for one nation to make a change? Does he agree that embarking on extended majority voting and embracing principles of common policy without considering what effect they would have on the rest of the world and on each producing state is a terrible warning for the next week or two?

Mr. Lilley: There is considerable logic, as always, in the hon. Member's position. I have no doubt that those who find the operation of the common agricultural policy unacceptable will be reluctant to see those principles extended more widely.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we shall need to be twice as flexible in future, first, to get talks going again and, secondly, to bring them to a successful conclusion? Does he further agree that France and Ireland were largely responsible for the breakdown of talks? Whatever the outcome of the talks, will he make it quite clear to those Governments that in future British taxpayers' money will not be used to bail out part-time, peasant and inefficient farmers in those countries?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend's first point is an extremely good one, which I hope will be recognised in the Community and among other negotiating partners to the GATT round. I do not want to point the finger at any countries involved in the talks, but those who were most willing to accept suspension and most reluctant to show flexibility should perhaps recognise that, in the next round, when greater flexibility will be needed because of the suspension, they should be the most forthcoming in coughing up the proposed concessions from their budgets and special interests.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I appreciate that the common agricultural policy is very much less than ideal and realise the extent to which it, and reluctance to reform it, led to this interruption, but does the Minister realise that there are matters of substance behind the concerns of many people in this country and in other countries about small agricultural units? Does he appreciate that there is a need to find some other way of providing support? Could he perhaps persuade our Common Market partners to reconsider the old British system of agricultural support that existed prior to 1972? Would not it be easier to operate in the GATT rounds and negotiations? Could not the Government consider taking the initiative of persuading our European partners of the advisability of reforming the CAP in that way?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley)—I am sure that the House wishes to join me in congratulating him on his elevation to responsibility for agricultural matters in the Province—has heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks and will be discussing them with our right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. There will have to be changes as a result of a successful GATT round and, indeed, if it were to fail, in the evolution of agriculture policy. The hon. Member's ideas will have to be taken into account in that. Given the pressures that have already been felt by the agricultural community in this country, I recognise, like him, that there are constraints on what can be done. We cannot ignore that.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): In the same way that the textiles industry is concerned about the future, so, too, is agriculture. With falling farm incomes and the greater responsibility for the environment that is being laid on agriculture, how can one accept further cuts?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes the point that I was making earlier: the agricultural community has had to

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bear considerable pressures, which we bore in mind in the negotiations. We sought, within the existing offer on the table, to try to make it more attractive to other partners in the GATT round without adversely affecting the position of farmers at home. We believe that that was possible and that, to a large extent, it will be possible in future.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): As the Minister admitted that further concessions will have to be made, will he expand a little on the alternative methods of supporting agriculture that will be necessary? Given his remarks about the need to reduce export subsidies and the high prices that the food-processing industry pays for raw materials in this country, what help will be given to that industry, which has to rely on restitution when it sells abroad?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should be under no misapprehension. I was not suggesting that additional cuts would have to be made on top of the 30 per cent. cut in export subsidies. Towards the end of the week, we discussed some way of ensuring that a 30 per cent. cut in total subsidies by the EC is reflected quasi-automatically in a 30 per cent. or similar reduction in export subsidies. We discussed other assurances to provide that, in years of falling agricultural prices, there is no ballooning of export subsidies, through volumes or through financial limits on the total amount of money going into those subsidies.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was careful to get into the basic EC agreement an assurance that any reduction should be non-discriminatory so that there is no discriminatory reduction in subsidies for processed food at the expense of basic products.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): As the food and drinks industry is the largest manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom, will my right hon. Friend confirm that when an agreement is finally reached it will not jeopardise the £2 billion of exports of food and drink to non-EC countries and the 60,000 jobs in various places, including great centres such as York?

Mr. Lilley: That is certainly a good point. We shall try to ensure in the agreement by Community partners that any change in the support mechanism will be non-discriminatory, particularly in terms of the support available for exports of processed food products.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Minister will recognise the importance of the textile industry to our manufacturing base. What contingency plans has he made in the event of the talks breaking down and nothing resulting for textiles? For instance, has he taken note of the four-point plan for textiles proposed by the textiles division of the Transport and General Workers Union? Will the right hon. Gentleman give us some hope for the industry and its employees?

Mr. Lilley: I am still strongly of the opinion that we can and must achieve a successful outcome to this round, not just because a sudden ending of MFA would have severe effects on and be unacceptable to many countries. We do not think that it would be sensible to start working on the assumption that the round will fail. We shall do all in our power to achieve a successful outcome. If we fail, we shall have to pick up the pieces.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Given my right hon. Friend's clarity of vision, does he agree that the alleged 30 per cent. offer made by the EEC was little more than a bogus fraud, because a 15 per cent. cut had allegedly already occurred and because, in respect of the other 15 per cent., the Council of Ministers and the Commission promised fully to compensate farmers for any reduction in protection? Bearing in mind that the EEC's budget for 1991—which has just been agreed and which, at £23 billion, represents the Community's highest-ever expenditure—seems likely to be broken, how can my right hon. Friend have the slightest optimism about the idea that we are likely to make progress? Is not this simply a disaster for British jobs?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend always shows a daunting knowledge of these figures, but the fact is that a 30 per cent. cut over 10 years—even if part is already under our belt—is a considerable reduction in subsidies. If the world can bring agriculture fully within the GATT round, it will be a major achievement. There will need to be further rounds before we can achieve the degree of development of GATT disciplines within the agricultural sector that has been achieved elsewhere. It will be a significant prize to get agriculture within the GATT round and we shall work hard towards that end.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Minister realise that his comments will have set alarm bells ringing in the minds of the men and women who depend on the British textile industry for their livelihoods and who are most anxious about the job losses that are now taking place? Will he give us a clear assurance that there is no prospect of the British Government's agreeing to the phasing out of the MFA, even over a 10-year period, unless the so-called five safeguards are incorporated under GATT? Will he also give a firm assurance that there is no question of the British Government's once again regarding the British textile industry as expendable?

Mr. Lilley: I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of that. The outline agreement on textiles that was approaching completion before the round was suspended was the sort of agreement which the British textile industry could have lived with and accepted. It envisaged a transitional period of about 10 years and that is not out of line with what the industry has asked for. It also envisaged considerable improvements in respect of intellectual property, rules and disciplines and market access, although the extent of those improvements will not become absolutely clear until we can finalise the whole round. Nevertheless, they were the sort of thing that the industry wanted. Far from coming in gradually as the MFA was phased out, many of those improvements would take effect more or less immediately and that would be a rather better outcome than that for which many in the industry hoped.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The Minister will be aware of the consequences for third-world economies of the failure of the round. Will not last week's shambles fuel those third-world countries' fears of a Fortress Europe? Is not the tragedy of all this that our traditional trading partners in the third world may well be forced into the arms of rival trading blocs?

Mr. Lilley: The less-developed countries certainly stand to gain significantly from a successful round and to lose

substantially from a failure to conclude the round. That was constantly in the minds of both the British Government and, I believe, the other parties to the negotiations. I held a number of meetings, including meetings with some of the less-developed countries. In general, although apprehensive about the prospect of trading blocs closing in on themselves—to which my hon. Friend referred—they believed that a successful round would be a major factor in improving their economies. The inclusion of agriculture in the agreement for the first time and the fact that more of the rules and disciplines of GATT will be brought to bear on their economies—something of which they were initially apprehensive—must in the long run benefit their economies, as it has benefited the economies of developed countries.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Was not the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) right to smell a Eurorat? Will the Minister admit that there has been a significant—one might say, "Major"—U-turn in the past couple of weeks? Three weeks ago, under the former Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, we had a bellicose defence of the American position and free trade, whereas we now have a whispered compliance with the aims of the French and Germans and other farming interests in Europe. That compliance will cost the average British family £14 a week—the amount needed to support the common agricultural policy. Is not that a little too much to pay just to give new Eurocredentials to the Prime Minister?

Mr. Lilley: The Government's position has been consistent throughout. We have sought flexibility within the Community and from other parties to the negotiations and, to the extent that we have attained flexibility in the Community's position and achieved some movement on services from the United States, we were anxious to draw the two sides together. We regret that the talks were suspended when some movement, at least, was being shown on both fronts.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that we have reached this stage with agricultural subsidies because of our failure to define exactly what a farmer is? Everyone seems afraid to tackle a situation whereby British farmers suffer because, in France and Germany, people who would not even be called allotment-holders here are called farmers? They often have jobs in factories during the day and scrabble in the soil at the weekends, but, none the less, receive huge subsidies. Is not it about time that the Common Market got down to defining what a farmer is, so that we can cut those outrageous subsidies? We must have the courage to do that. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food seemed to say yesterday that it was the Americans' fault. It is not. The fault lies with us and only we can solve the problem. The new Government must have the courage to do that.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend's point lies behind the insistence of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that any changes in agricultural support should be non-discriminatory. We are determined that British farmers, who, as my hon. Friend said, are genuine, should not lose out when new forms of support are developed which might otherwise have been oriented to the kind of farmers that he attributed largely to continental countries. We are determined that that should not be the case and that any support arrangements should benefit British farmers fully, along with any help directed to continental farmers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): With regard to intellectual property rights, what was the thinking on the issue of the patenting of living organisms which is a matter of enormous importance to the pharmaceutical industry? Some of us believe that there is a danger of a lawyers' paradise being created around the real interests of innovation.

In connection with tropical forest products, does the Minister accept that those of us who were fortunate enough to participate in the recent Inter-Parliamentary Union visit to Zaire received the impression from Ministers in Kinshasa that too much emphasis was placed on policies that would actually be detrimental to the preservation of the rain forests? Before advantages are given to tropical forest products, will the Community be sure that those are not disadvantages for the rain forest, of which Zaire has 46 per cent. of that which remains in Africa?

Mr. Lilley: The outline agreement on TRIPs—trade-related aspects of intellectual property—envisages that each country shall enforce in its own patent law and other rights. It accepts that those have been beneficial in encouraging the development of new products and, by the same logic, will be beneficial in encouraging the development of new plants and other agricultural products. With regard to the importance of rain forests, I am not sure what provisions in the embryonic GATT round the hon. Gentleman believes would apply to them.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): While we all welcome the notes of flexibility and qualified optimism that my right hon. Friend has struck from the Dispatch Box this afternoon, does not he also fear that the world could be on the edge of an era of trade wars particularly if the Americans begin to use their formidable section 301 powers of their trade legislation to retaliate against what they rightly see as excessive agricultural exports subsidies by the EEC? In that context, are not the discussions of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the Council of Ministers at the weekend absolutely crucial? How can those discussions have great hope of success when agricultural subsidies and the GATT talks have a much lower priority on the agenda for discussions than what many of us consider less important matters, such as economic and monetary union and even political union?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, particularly about the danger of the outbreak of trade wars if the round were to fail absolutely. If that happens, we should not simply forgo the benefits of what would have been a very important round; we should probably also slip backwards with greater use of grey area measures, as they are called, and voluntary restraint arrangements. We might also slip into a trade war and, as my hon. Friend said, there might be resort to super-301 rights which give rise to great antagonism among other GATT participants.

With regard to this weekend's meeting between European Heads of Government, my hon. Friend is right to state that this time the EC must recognise the importance to the Community, as one of the world's great trading blocs, of a successful outcome to the round. That

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must be given appropriate priority in the discussions—over and above, if need be, other matters that my hon. Friend would consider less important.

Terrorism

4.43 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the new phase of IRA terrorism and intimidation which surfaced this weekend in County Fermanagh and which has forced both Roman Catholic and Protestant businesses to insert public notices in the local paper announcing that, under threat from the IRA, they will not in the future do any business with or serve Her Majesty's security forces."

The matter is specific. I have a copy of the newspaper involved at hand. It contains a series of adverts and I will quote from several of them. One from a Roman Catholic business states:

"At the request of the Fermanagh Brigade of the Provisional IRA, I Barry McCormack Proprietor of Silver Dollar Take Aways in Lisnaskea and Irvinestown will not be serving members of the Security Forces."

Another advert, from a Protestant business, states:

"The Proprietors of Henry's Filling Station, Lisnaskea, wish to announce that they can no longer welcome business from the Security Forces."

Another advert, this time from Traynor's cafe at Maguiresbridge, which is a Roman Catholic business, states:

"Owing to a phone call we can no longer serve the Security Forces."

Another advert from a Protestant business, W. J. Kennedy at Magheraveely, states:

"We wish to make it publicly known that we will no longer serve the security forces."

The matter is specific. Had it happened on this side of the water, there would have been a furore in the House.

The matter is also important. Anyone who reads Irish history knows the power of boycott. The terrorists will escalate this weapon in their armoury. Terrorists always prevail when law enforcement powers are not exercised by the legal Government. Many people who are against the IRA and all its works have had to bow because they are on record as saying that they went to the authorities, who told them that unfortunately they could not protect them.

This is a matter of life and death. It strikes at those good and true men and women who serve in the security forces in Northern Ireland. They put their lives at risk to serve all the community and they are being struck at in this way by murderous thugs.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the new phase of IRA terrorism and intimidation which surfaced this weekend in County Fermanagh and which has forced both Roman Catholic and Protestant businesses to insert public notices in the local press announcing that, under threat from the IRA, they will not in the future do any business with or serve Her Majesty's security forces."

I listened with deep concern to the hon. Gentleman but, as he knows, my decision is whether to give the matter priority over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. In this case, I regret that the matter does not fall within the criteria laid down under the Standing Order

and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House. Nevertheless, I hope that he will find other opportunities to debate the matter.

Electricity Supplies (East Midlands)

4.47 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the failure of the Home Secretary's statement in response to the private notice question about the severe weather condition to refer to the electricity crisis in the east midlands."

In the East Midlands electricity board area 300,000 customers have had their supplies cut. Some of those supplies have been cut for two and a half days and some people will not get their supplies reconnected for at least another four days, and that includes my constituents in Barrow Hill.

The cut in electricity supply has caused a further crisis at water pumping stations and many of the areas do not have water supplies. That massive crisis was not referred to in the Home Secretary's statement in response to the private notice question. A statement should have been made by a Minister from the Department of Energy, which should be co-ordinating the problems facing the East Midlands electricity board. That board is undoubtedly doing the best it can in difficult circumstances, but it faces a massive problem.

If the crisis had occurred in the south, I am sure that we would have been told that Bellwin scheme money would be available. Such statements should have been made in respect of Derbyshire county council to help it run its services.

It is essential that electricity supplies be resumed as early as possible. The disruption has been caused by cables falling under the weight of the snow. Trees have come down and pylons have been destroyed. That has led to a massive problem. Nearly 750,000 people in the east midlands area have been affected and see no hope in the future. A Minister should come to the House and say something to ensure that the full resources of the Government are directed at resolving a massive problem in the east midlands area and in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in particular.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the electricity supply crisis in the east midlands."

I in no way underestimate the importance of what the hon. Member has said, but I regret that I must give him the same answer as I gave the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I regret that his application does not meet the criteria laid down under the Standing Order, and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House. However, no doubt he will have other opportunities to bring the matter to the House.

Parliamentary Conference

4.50 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that last Thursday the House debated the forthcoming European Council and intergovernmental conferences to take place in Rome. During that debate reference was made to unofficial versions of the declaration of a parliamentary conference which took place there recently and which came to a conclusion on 30 November. I wonder whether you could tell hon. Members when we are likely to get the official text of that declaration and whether it will be available to the House prior to the important conferences of next weekend.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for raising that matter. I received a personal copy of the document this morning and I have arranged to have it placed in the Library of the House so that hon. Members may see it.

BILL PRESENTED

Human Rights Bill

Mr. Graham Allen presented a Bill to provide protection in the courts of the United Kingdom for the rights and freedoms specified in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to which the United Kingdom is a party: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 39.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft General Lighthouse Authorities (Beacons: Hyperbolic Systems) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Orders of the Day

Road Traffic Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.52 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the first time I have had the pleasure of appearing at the Dispatch Box in my new incarnation——

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I will give you 12 months.

Mr. Rifkind: I start as I mean to go on.

I cannot claim to have been other than surprised at the responsibilities that I have been given. Indeed, I could not help but recollect the splendid words from a sonnet by Wordsworth:

"Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport".

My joy was enhanced by the realisation that, as a result of that translation, I would enjoy the company of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) for many weeks, months and perhaps years to come—a veritable transport of delight.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson). During his period as Secretary of State for Transport he achieved a great deal. He not only identified the great priority that must be given to the subject but ensured that the resources which will be available over the next few years will be substantial. My task and that of my hon. Friends has been made much easier by my right hon. Friend's achievements.

Today we are to consider the details of the Road Traffic Bill, but perhaps I could precede my comments by one or two brief remarks about wider transport matters which arise out of the legislation. I begin by commenting on what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said. Arising out of the events of the past two or three days, I have asked my Department to review the current arrangements for dealing with sudden weather crises to see whether further improvements can be made to assist the movement of passengers and freight at such times. That review will also take account of arrangements in comparable countries. I am satisfied that action for dealing with snow on motorways, trunk roads and railway lines was put into hand quickly and effectively, but there is always room for improvement and it is right that we should make the effort to see whether further improvements would be appropriate. I hope to report to the House on that matter as soon as possible.

I shall now make a couple of brief comments on general transport policy, which will be of interest and relevant to the Bill. For many years we have been conscious of how transport is crucial to the economy of the country, given that we are a great trading nation and that the movement of our freight, imports and exports is the lifeblood of our economy. I am conscious also that transport is highly relevant to the convenience of members of the public as they go about their normal business. What has become clear in recent years is the extent to which a new dimension is relevant to the debate on transport—the environmental dimension and the impact on the quality of life of our people as a whole which the current transport circumstances inevitably produce.

For millions of our fellow citizens, particularly in the south-east but also to some extent in every town and city across the land, the sheer growth in the volume of traffic as a consequence of the increasing prosperity of the country has brought major problems, frustration, congestion and irritation. I have no doubt that, in the months and years to come, that environmental dimension —the implications for the quality of life of people arising out of the huge and increasing volume of transport that the country will experience—will capture our attention to an even greater extent than in the past.

For some time I have been conscious of what I can describe only as a rather sterile debate as between road and rail transport and the priorities that should be attached to either. That debate is often conducted on a rather superficial level. Only last week, when some journalists discovered that I regularly travel by train from Edinburgh to London, I was immediately declared to be a new champion of the railways. No doubt, the discovery that I flew down to Heathrow this morning will be a cause of depression to the same commentators. In fact, like the vast majority of our fellow citizens, I choose road, rail or air transport depending on convenience and cost. That is the only sensible basis on which to expect the public to choose their method of transport.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Although I am delighted to hear that my right hon and learned Friend travels to Scotland by air and train, has he ever done so by road? What was his experience?

Mr. Rifkind: I have travelled regularly by road. On most occasions I enjoyed the experience enormously, but there are occasional exceptions to that general principle. My hon. Friend must speculate as to when they are likely to have been.

There will be increased commercial opportunities for the use of the rail network. That would clearly be beneficial to the country as a whole. One of the great delights in the past few years has been the enormous increase in the number of railway stations which have been opened or reopened under the present Government. That process is opening a new chapter in railway history. However, I am conscious also that nine times as many people use the roads as passengers and for freight. Therefore, any sensible investment policy must reflect both requirements of our national infrastructure.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): What concerns many people about the rail-road debate is that British rail appears—in the north of Scotland, at any rate—to be throwing aside opportunities to increase rail freight. It also seems to be throwing aside opportunities to retain passenger transport. Does the Secretary of State accept that one of the problems in Aberdeen is that British Rail is busy cutting its through services to London while at the same time claiming that there is no need for electrification between Aberdeen and Edinburgh because we shall have a better service? How can that be so when it is destroying conditions to improve services?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's description of what is happening is unnecessarily alarmist. He referred to freight services and one is obviously aware of the problems

faced by Speedlink, and British Rail's current examination of them. The way in which British Rail is finding alternative ways of carrying freight on the network, which has been traditionally carried by Speedlink, is particularly encouraging. No doubt, that will be welcomed. For all services—both passenger and freight—it is necessary for British Rail to identify not only the public interest, but the proper use of what will always be finite resources. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is the only logical basis on which these matters can be considered.

I recognise that, increasingly, the debate on transport cannot be conducted purely at the national level. If there was ever a theme to which both the European dimension and the wider international dimension are relevant, it is transport. While the Government continue—as we shall —to emphasise the liberalisation of transport in the public interest, the debate will increasingly be conducted on both the European and the wider levels because that is the appropriate way to make progress in the interests of the public as a whole.

The purpose of the Bill is to save lives—it is as simple as that. Many of its provisions will make an important contribution towards continuing the significant improvements in road safety that we have seen in recent years. Although there has been considerable progress. I am conscious that much remains to be done. Nevertheless, it is right to recognise what has been achieved in the past 10 years. There is some comfort in the fact that, since the 1960s, despite a 250 per cent. increase in the volume of traffic on our roads, the number of fatalities has been substantially reduced from 8,000 per year to 5,000 per year. If we compared the United Kingdom's achievements with the figures for most other comparable European countries, again, some comfort can be taken from what has been achieved here in the past 10 or 15 years. The casualty rate in the United Kingdom is 9·2 deaths for every 100,000 persons. In the western part of Germany—the old Federal Republic—the figure is 13·4 per 100,000, while in France it is 20·6, in Spain it is 21·1 and in Portugal it is 33·2.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his new and elevated position as Secretary of State for Transport. He has made a telling point about comparisons with other countries. Will he confirm that Australia and Scandinavia have also reduced their fatalities by opting for random breath testing? Will my right hon. and learned Friend use the opportunity of his introductory remarks now, as we come towards the Christmas festivities, to state that he accepts that logic and the fact that more than 91 per cent. of people have said in opinion polls that they would support a Government who introduced random breath tests?

Mr. Rifkind: I acknowledge the progress that has been made in Australia, although I understand that that country still has a higher casualty rate than the United Kingdom. Random breath testing is a difficult and sensitive issue. It is right constantly to consider the experience of other countries, and it is important to remember that the existing legislation permits the police a wide discretion—which is virtually identical to random breath testing. At present, any police officer in the exercise of his duty can require a vehicle to stop. If the police officer then has any reason to believe that that vehicle, which might have been stopped randomly, is being driven by someone under the influence of alcohol, the police officer can require a test to be taken. Therefore, there is an enormously wide discretion at present. However, I wish to continue to study the experience of other countries, which have different statutes, to see whether anything further can be learnt from their experiences.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way because I am conscious of the time and I have given way to him already. No doubt he will make his comments later, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Robert Hughes: On this very point——

Mr. Rifkind: No. I shall not give way on this point.

I have made certain comparisons with other European countries which are favourable to the United Kingdom. However, I am conscious that the current position remains extremely serious. Every day, 15 people are killed on our roads and 170 are seriously injured. It is against that background that the Government adopted the target of seeking to reduce those casualties by a full one third by the end of the decade.

The proposals in part I of the Bill have the potential to make a valuable contribution to achieving that target. They implement the recommendations of the White Paper which was published in February 1989. This was the Government's response to the recommendations of the review of road traffic law, which was carried out under the chairmanship of Dr. Peter North. I pay tribute to Dr. North and to the review, which played an important part not only in the Government's thinking but in the wider public debate.

The law has a vital role to play in promoting the safety of all road users, whether as drivers, passengers, riders or pedestrians. It provides for those who infringe or threaten the safety of others to be dealt with. The knowledge that such action will be taken means a higher overall standard of driving and riding behaviour. There is no doubt that without good traffic law and its robust enforcement the toll on our roads would be very much higher. If we can improve and update that law and make its enforcement even more effective, there is every prospect that the casualty rate can be reduced. That is what the first part of the Bill is intended to do.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): First, I offer my congratulations to the Secretary of State on his sideways transfer. Does he agree that causing death by dangerous or careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs has often led to amazingly light sentences being imposed by sheriffs? I exclude Greenock sheriffs from that criticism. Can the Secretary of State assure me that drivers who are convicted of culpable homicide and dreadful offences of this kind will receive the heavy sentences that they so manifestly deserve?

Mr. Rifkind: A person convicted of culpable homicide in Scotland could be subject to any sentence because, so far as I am aware, there is no statutory limit. Sentences for those guilty of causing death by dangerous or drunken driving are dealt with in the Bill, under which a maximum penalty of five years will be available to the courts if that is judged appropriate.

[Mr. Rifkind]

We are attacking the problem on three fronts. First, we are reforming the main road traffic offences. We are determined to crack down on bad driving. It has not always proved possible in the past in England and Wales to secure convictions for the existing offences of reckless driving and causing death by reckless driving because of the need for juries to be satisfied as to the driver's state of mind at the time the act of bad driving took place. We are therefore creating new offences which should more satisfactorily permit convictions for bad driving. We are also creating a new offence to deal more effectively with the drunk driver who drives badly and kills. There is never any excuse for drink-driving. A drunk driver who kills in these circumstances must expect the most severe penalty. We are also plugging a gap in the law with a new offence in England and Wales to deal with the vandals who put lives at risk by placing or throwing objects such as concrete blocks on to roads. If my Scottish colleagues are interested to know why that does not apply in Scotland, it is because the existing law on malicious mischief adequately deals with such matters.

The second area of action is penalties. The current offence of causing death by reckless driving already carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment. That will be retained for the new dangerous driving offence where death is caused. There will be be a similar penalty for the other new offence of causing death when under the influence of drink or drugs. Offences of this gravity should be severely punished.

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful for what the Secretary of State has said and I add my congratulations to him on his new appointment. He has started well, but I shall say more about that later. As Dr. North was concerned about deaths on the road which are caused by fatigue—not only by drink and drugs—does the Secretary of State intend to include provisions on fatigue in the Bill?

Mr. Rifkind: I should like to hear the hon. Gentleman state with slightly greater care exactly what he has in mind. We did not think it appropriate to create an offence of careless driving that causes death because it could involve sentences which might be disproportionate to the gravity of the behaviour, that is, the careless nature of the driving of the individual concerned. If the hon. Gentleman will expand on that point, I will deal with it in more detail.

In other circumstances the maximum penalty for the new dangerous driving offence will be two years in prison —again the same as for the current reckless driving offence. We shall also introduce two new sentencing options, which should have a major effect on the behaviour of road users. People convicted of the most serious driving offences will have to take a much tougher driving test before being allowed back on the road at the end of a period of disqualification. We are also providing for an experiment in rehabilitation courses for offenders convicted for drink-driving offences. Experience from experiments abroad has suggested that such schemes, which encourage offenders to rethink their attitudes to drinking and driving, can have a significant effect on rates of reoffending. There will be powers to mount a national scheme if the experiment proves successful.

Finally, there are measures to improve enforcement of the law through the more effective use of camera technology to detect speeding and red light jumping offences. Cameras will be placed where road safety benefits can be maximised. Their presence should have a major deterrent effect. And they could lead to a reduction of as much as 5 per cent. in road accidents.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): On technological aids, as I understand it, the aim of the Bill is to give the Secretary of State powers to introduce their use and to rule on the admissibility of evidence from them. Is he aware that one of the most serious causes of accidents is driving too close behind the car in front? Is he further aware that technological aids are available to give a warning that someone is driving too close or to prevent it? Such aids are not mentioned in the Bill and my right hon. and learned Friend may not wish to answer now, but will he consider the possibility of making the clause sufficiently wide to enable provision for such technological aids to be incorporated in the Bill? I understand that they are available abroad.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall be happy to look into the matter raised by my hon. Friend. Technology constantly produces new opportunities. If new devices can make a significant contribution to saving lives and preventing injury, we shall consider them in a constructive spirit. I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point.

Before I turn to part II of the Bill, I shall deal with the clauses in part I. Clauses 1 and 2 replace the existing reckless driving offences, as I have earlier explained, with new dangerous driving offences. These will be based more closely on the actual standard of driving. Clauses 3 and 4 deal with the menace of drink-driving, in particular by creation of the new offence of causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs. Clause 5 contains the new offence, which I also mentioned earlier, of causing danger to road users by placing or throwing objects on to roads.

Clauses 7 to 13 extend the existing powers to test vehicles on roads and to prohibit the driving of dangerous vehicles. Henceforth, it will be possible to test vehicles on roads for conformity with all construction and use requirements including emissions. The powers of prohibition will apply to private cars as well goods vehicles and public service vehicles and will, in circumstances of immediate danger, be exercisable by authorised police officers as well as the Department's vehicle examiners.

Clauses 17, 19 and 30 provide for the more effective use of camera technology. They make provisions as to the admissibility of camera evidence, provide safeguards on the reliability of the equipment and simplify follow-up procedures through the fixed penalty system. Proper enforcement, with proper safeguards, will bring valuable road safety benefits.

Clauses 23 to 25 make changes to the operation of disqualification and the penalty points system. In future, people disqualified for a specific offence such as drink-driving will no longer have the penalty points from previous unrelated offences wiped from their licences. This will act as a reminder to them that they must act responsibly once their licence is returned. It will also encourage the courts to make more use of their existing powers to order short periods of disqualification, for which provision is made in clause 29.

Mr. Holt: In a recent case in my constituency, involving the death of one of my constituents, the person who

perpetrated that death was given penalty points which were made to run concurrently with the eight points that he already had—they were not totted up. Under the new legislation, will my right hon. and learned Friend stop the current magistrates' practice of allowing concurrent penalties?

Mr. Rifkind: In general, it is appropriate for the magistrate to have discretion to decide whether a penalty should be concurrent or consecutive, but my hon. Friend has drawn the point to my attention and we shall consider whether it would be appropriate to stop the practice.

Clauses 26 and 27 set out the arrangements for the rehabilitation courses for drink drivers. The courses will be designed to influence offenders' attitudes to drinking and driving and to encourage self-examination. Offenders who complete courses successfully will be entitled to a reduction in the period of disqualification. The scheme will initially take the form of an experiment in selected areas. We shall need to monitor the experiment carefully before deciding whether to embark on a full-scale national scheme.

Clause 28 places courts under a duty to order re-tests for those convicted of the new dangerous driving offences. The extended test will probably be twice the length of the normal driving test and consequently more demanding. Courts will also have wide discretion to order a re-test for people convicted of other offences which result in disqualification. These optional powers will be particularly helpful where offenders' driving behaviour suggests that the discipline of a test will be useful in determining whether they should be allowed back on the road.

Clause 32 simplifies the procedures for local authorities to vary parking charges at designated parking places, and clause 33 deals with the power of local authorities in London to appoint parking attendants.

Part II of the Bill contains a major package to deal with traffic in London. Demand for travel in London is forecast to grow. It reflects and reinforces the prosperity of the capital, the benefits of which flow to the whole country. The increase in commuting to central London has been carried entirely by public transport. Since 1983, the number of people commuting by rail has increased by 22 per cent. and we have a massive investment programme in London Underground and Network SouthEast to cater for them. By contrast, the numbers commuting by car has fallen by more than 10 per cent. But other traffic in London has been increasing—for instance, the number of vans coming into central London has risen by more than half—and major new developments are bound to generate some extra traffic, so it is not realistic to set limits on traffic growth in London. Our aims are to cater for growth in London's economy and to relieve the worst congestion where this can be done without unacceptable environmental and social costs. We have a major programme of road improvements in hand, particularly to upgrade the North Circular road and to improve access to east London and Docklands. However, we have to accept that the scope for new road construction is limited, particularly in inner London.

Without any action, the problem would steadily worsen. Over the past 20 years, average speeds have gradually fallen—for example, peak hour speeds in inner London have fallen from 14 mph to about 11 mph. Drivers increasingly use side roads to avoid overcrowded main roads, causing disturbances and accidents in residential areas.

Therefore, we are creating a network of priority routes, or "red routes", which will help people and goods to move around London more easily. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), who called for such an innovation some time ago and has campaigned tirelessly for it. He mentioned to me that he would have liked to be here today but he explained that he is attending a conference in France. I pay tribute to his pioneering work in this respect. The routes will be subject to special controls on stopping, loading and unloading, which will be strictly enforced, with appropriate penalties for non-compliance. They will be managed by our traffic director, who will ensure the efficient operation of the network. The reduction of avoidable hold-ups will increase reliability and cut waste of resources and the pollution caused by stop-start conditions.

There will be special provision for buses, the performance of which suffers due to congestion. It will be possible to make room for better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, and measures will be introduced to keep traffic out of residential areas, which will have safety benefits.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way to me on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box as Transport Secretary. While I agree with much of the description that he gave, will he take it from me that, although the remedy may help marginally, it is not the most effective one and that there was insufficient consultation on that part of the Bill, which is a bureaucratic nightmare?

Mr. Rifkind: I await with considerable interest and anticipation a description of the remedy which the hon. Gentleman believes would solve the problem more effectively than the Government's proposal.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Secretary of State must be aware that the proposed experimental red route runs through my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). During the consultation period, there was overwhelming opposition to the imposition of the route on the area—not least by the local authority, which is elected by the people of the area. The opposition was mounted following the successful opposition to the building of a major through-route in the area. The red route will bring an increase in traffic through the area, and that traffic will travel at higher speeds. In effect, we shall see the construction of a large barrier through the middle of communities. Does the Secretary of State agree that the real solution to London's traffic problems is to invest more resources in public transport and to reduce the number of vehicles entering London? London cannot cope with any increase in traffic. In effect, the Government will sit idly by and watch an increase in London's traffic take place.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government are increasing resources for public transport, and by a far greater amount than for many years. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and others will welcome that. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I remind him that whatever measures might be taken, including the sort of measures which I have no doubt he has in mind, there will still be a considerable volume of

[Mr. Rifkind]

traffic throughout London. It is important that that traffic should, if possible, be able to move more easily and without congestion. Congestion frustrates drivers, increases the dangers for pedestrians in the part of the town where it exists, and is likely to lead to an increase in casualties.

I can reassure the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that the proposed red route is a pilot scheme. The experiment will be carried out and we shall be able to see the effect that it has. The Government and, I am sure, the local authority will be examining it with great interest to ascertain whether the implications and consequences are helpful or otherwise. Where red routes have been applied elsewhere, there has been a beneficial consequence for the movement of traffic. We hope that that will be replicated in London.

Along with red routes, the Bill will also provide for the establishment of a new and more rational system of permitted parking, mainly at meter and residents' bays, to be administered and enforced by local authorities. This will release significant numbers of police traffic wardens to enforce legal parking controls on red routes and elsewhere. At the same time, we are providing traffic wardens with wider powers to clamp and impound vehicles. The potential benefits are enormous. More than 200,000 parking offences are committed in the capital each day. Some estimates suggest that the economic cost in central London alone is about £140 million a year. The initiative is the first of its type for more than 20 years, and the widest ever. It is part of the Government's aim to make the best use of existing roads throughout London and forms part of our broad strategic approach to the development of London's transport system.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that in Westminster, where the police have pioneered the use of wheel clamping and towing away, there has been a dramatic improvement in the control of parking and the movement of traffic? My right hon. and learned Friend is right to say that the most significant increase in the volume of traffic arises from the use of commercial vehicles and not from private cars.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct. I believe that the number of cars coming into London has decreased over the years by 10 per cent., but the number of vans and commercial vehicles has continued to increase. We are seeking to respond to that phenomenon.

Clause 35 gives the Secretary of State the power to designate a network of priority routes to ease the flow of traffic on London's main roads. Clause 36 gives the Secretary of State power to issue new traffic management guidance to London's local authorities and the Traffic Director for London. The guidance will focus on the Secretary of State's aims for the network, and explain how the routes fit into the Government's approach to the development of transport in London. Clause 37 gives the Secretary of State power to appoint an independent Traffic Director for London to co-ordinate the establishment of the routes and monitor their operation. It also gives the Secretary of State power to set the director's objectives.

Mr. Corbyn: The Secretary of State is dealing with a serious part of the Bill. The people of London lost the power to elect a London-wide authority when the Greater London council was abolished. It now appears that we are to have a traffic authority for London by appointment, thrust upon us by the Secretary of State. Where is the democracy in that? Or do Londoners get no say any more in the planning of London's traffic?

Mr. Rifkind: The director's responsibilities will be limited to the proposed red routes. I hope that he will be working alongside the local authorities. He will submit a report to Parliament on the way in which he has exercised his duties. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's criticisms are justified.

Clause 38 requires the director to issue a network plan to the London local authorities, setting out the overall framework for the routes, the way in which the priority route measures are to be introduced and the timetable for their introduction.

Clauses 39 to 47 cover the preparation and implementation of local plans, which will set out in detail the priority route measures to be introduced. There will be a duty on relevant London local authorities to prepare and implement plans for priority routes for which they are the highway authority. The plans will need to be approved by the traffic director. The director will have a similar duty to prepare and implement local plans for trunk roads designated as priority routes where he is directed to do so by the Secretary of State. The traffic director and the Secretary of State will have fall-back powers where the local authorities fail to meet their duties. However, the implementation of the network will be very much for the benefit of all London's residents, so we are looking forward to the local authorities' co-operation and envisage the fall-back powers being used only as a last resort.

Clause 48 requires the Secretary of State to issue parking guidance to local authorities in London to ensure a co-ordinated approach to parking. The aim will be to avoid distortions between one area of London and another, to maximise the benefits of the priority routes and to improve the movement of traffic throughout London. Part of the guidance will cover the introduction and operation of the new system of permitted on-street parking in London.

Clauses 49 to 58 make provision for the new system. Excess charges set by individual local authorities will be replaced by standard penalty charges set by a joint committee. Instead of being backed by the threat of prosecution, they will be collected as a civil debt, and all enforcement at permitted parking places—meter bays and residents' spaces—will be carried out by local authority parking attendants instead of police traffic wardens. They will have the power to wheel-clamp vehicles parked in breach of the orders. It will be the function of the committee to set the charges associated with wheel-clamping and removal. It will also appoint parking adjudicators to whom aggrieved drivers may appeal.

Clause 59 provides for the Secretary of State to make grants to the traffic director to cover the reasonable expenditure that he incurs in relation to the priority routes. As the local authority roads in the network will comprise only about 30 per cent. of the total, and the work on these roads will be for the benefit of the network as a whole, it is proposed that the director will make appropriate payments to the local authorities from the grant.

I believe that this Bill will make an important contribution to the efficiency and safety of transport, both in London through the major programme for the easing of

congestion, and nationally through the reform of road traffic law. It has already been welcomed by a number of important commentators and organisations involved with road transport matters. The Automobile Association saw the Bill

"as a means of keeping dangerous, aggressive and antisocial drivers off Britain's roads."

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents welcomed the provisions set out in the Bill and has said that it views the Bill

"as a very positive step."

A spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers has written:

"Seldom have the recommendations of a Government review body met with such unanimous support from interested parties. It is hoped that the Bill will serve to reduce the tragic waste of life on our roads."

I am sure that the House will wish to give the Bill a Second Reading, and I so commend.

5.28 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): First, I offer my congratulations to the Secretary of State. Having listened to him this afternoon, I think that I shall find more agreement with him that I have with his predecessors. I presume, however, that once we get into the area of transport policy, disagreement will begin.

We start on a good note with the Bill, which is about road safety. If its aim is to improve road safety, that will unite both sides of the House. I am delighted to be able to give it that support. The introductory remarks of the Secretary of State reflect, I think, the way in which he will approach his job. I am delighted that that is so. I wondered what sort of character the right hon. and learned Gentleman was. Those of us who represent constituencies south of Scotland hear of the battles that are taking place in Scottish constituencies.

This morning I read a profile of the right hon. and learned Gentleman in *Transport Week*, a magazine published by the Freight Transport Association. The headline described him as the

"Scot who could knock Transport into kilter"

The profile is complimentary and we already know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has a great reputation as a thinker and debater. I was particularly impressed on one occasion when he made a speech without notes, but I note that the practice was not followed today. No doubt the detail of transport will exercise his mind and he will have to keep close to his notes. I am glad that, at last, he has joined the normal mortals of the Chamber.

The profile describes the Secretary of State as an ambitious lawyer. He will certainly need to be that if he is to understand the technical matters behind the Bill. The article also says that his promotion was a necessary climb up the ladder. I am not sure that the same could be said of previous Secretaries of State and we shall wait and see what happens to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Secretary of State has already realised that it is important to pursue a different policy from that pursued in the past and that that is more important than a different face at the Department. That change of emphasis was clear from his speech today when he spoke about the consequences for the environment—presumably that means more than just planting trees on roadsides, which was the policy advocated by the previous Secretary of State. The right hon. and learned Gentleman also spoke about integration and planning, which are important issues and are at the heart of Labour party policy. Given that his Department seems to be pinching most of our ideas, I suggest that the right hon. and learned Gentleman consults two documents produced by us, "Moving Britain into Europe" and "Moving Britain into the 1990s". They would add to his thinking on transport.

I noted that the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that it was important to recognise that Europe will have an important effect on our transport policy. I recall a television interview with the Minister for Public Transport when it was pointed out to him that the European railway system was much better than our own. He replied that it was the job of the United Kingdom and not the Europeans to run our railways. Perhaps the Minister will heed what his Secretary of State said about learning from the Europeans, as they have produced a better rail system than our own. I accept, of course, that there is also much to be gained from our railway system.

Today gives me the opportunity to make an unusual pact with the Secretary of State: can we agree to take ideology out of transport? The tragedy is that arguments about planning and intervention have been described in terms of ideology, but those arguments are all about achieving a better transport system. In Europe, Governments of the left and right have agreed that there is a role for Government, public money, planning and intervention. If both sides of the House recognise that, we have a good opportunity to turn Britain's transport system into a good one. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must accept that he has inherited a mess and a transport system in crisis. I hope that he will make the necessary changes.

The profile in the FTA magazine also described the right hon. and learned Gentleman as a winner in Scotland. I was rather confused about that, because, as an outsider, I thought that he had had more than his fair share of problems. After all, the poll tax was pretty disastrous when it was introduced up there; there was civil war in the Conservative party and support for it had rapidly declined. I should have thought that any job in this Cabinet was better for him than staying in Scotland. Whether he is a winner or not, I hope that he will do much better when dealing with the United Kingdom's transport system.

We must recognise that the role of the Government is important. It is also important to consider the role of the Department of Transport in terms of problems associated with bad weather. The Department could do a lot about co-ordinating policy and I am not satisfied that the Home Office is the right Department for that. I am glad that the Secretary of State has also recognised that we could learn a great deal from Europe about how to cope with such adverse weather.

Access to motorways and the use of railways are crucial in severe weather. It was interesting to note that, today, most hon. Members complained about problems associated with motor cars. If our public transport system were more effective, however, it could make a much greater contribution in such circumstances. Many car drivers use their vehicles because they are more reliable than our transport system. That is a sad reflection on what has happened to transport services in the past few years.

Hon. Members have already related the problems that they experienced in their cars at the weekend and I am not averse to relating the difficulties I have had when attempting to catch various trains. On Friday I intended to catch the 5.33 pm Pullman to Hull, but when I reached the

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Victoria line I found that there was a delay of half an hour because another train was stuck on the line. For the best part of 25 minutes no train appeared and most people missed their connections—I was one of them and I took a later fast train to Leeds. In the past I have spoken about those marvellous trains that travel at 140 mph, but even that train was 40 minutes late getting into Doncaster. That delay could not be blamed on bad weather, as it was still fine on Friday evening. My story illustrates that the problem relates to the reliability of our system. Such reliability is crucial and I look forward to debating that with the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

We support part I of the Bill, but we have many criticisms to make about part II, which relates to London and priority routes. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) will have much to say about that later. I want to concentrate on part I, because, as the Secretary of State said, it is concerned with safety, saving lives and reducing the incidence of serious injury. We recognise that our safety record is better than that of Europe, and the Government can readily claim some credit for that. The death and accident rate among the young and old suggests that the control of speed limits within our cities is crucial if we are to reduce such accidents. The Bill will give powers, for the first time, to reduce speed limits in urban areas and that is welcome.

The Government may talk about centralisation, but, once they abolished the Greater London council and took over control of the underground and bus services, standards grew considerably worse. We were told often enough that hon. Members would be able to debate the accountability of those transport authorities despite the abolition of the GLC. When we asked how that would be possible, we were told that we would be able to debate that issue when considering the supplementary rates. Now, as a result of the poll tax, however, we no longer have a debate on the supplementary rates and, therefore, those transport authorities are less accountable than when they were under the control of the GLC.

The traffic supremo is accountable to no one, save the Secretary of State. He can enforce powers over the local authorities and those authorities will have little control. As far as I can understand it, the traffic supremo is nothing but a quango. I thought that the Government spent most of their time saying that they wanted to get rid of such things.

I agree that it is essential that we must deal with the problems caused by urban traffic, but if the Government want to do anything about improving transport in our cities more emphasis should be placed on the use of buses rather than private vehicles.

I note that the right hon. Member for Birmingham——

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Northfield.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman should not be so ambitious. I meant to refer to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I may have got his constituency wrong, but I am right to say that he did most to deregulate our bus services—a decision which everyone recognises to have been disastrous. When the present Secretary of State was responsible for Scotland he did not make the same mistake. I remember that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield spent a lot of his time welcoming and waving off British Coachways, which he described as a new enterprise with a cutting edge. I am afraid to say that it lasted just 18 months and was taken over by the privatised National Bus system. That great new enterprise could not stand up to the competition because it did not have the necessary resources, let alone a reservation system, to cope. Another great idea, which was part of the cutting edge of enterprise, failed. The deregulation of buses was a catalogue of disasters—catalogued by a number of authorities and not just by me. It is up to people to make their judgment about it.

I disagree with nothing that the Secretary of State said about part I of the Bill—the controversy relates to what has been left out. Hon. Members on both sides have already revealed the strength of feeling about random testing and drink-driving. That is a major issue on which I hope the House has the opportunity to vote. I am sad and sorry that the Secretary of State has not seen his way to include it in the Bill. To be fair, I am also sorry that consideration of random testing was not included in Dr. North's terms of reference. It was unfortunate that, although he spent some time considering drink-driving, he did not look at random testing. Anyone who has met Dr. North will know that he has strong views on the matter. We must take the opportunity of the Bill to deal with that issue.

The drink-driving aspect is important. I appreciate that the Home Office set up a committee which reported on this issue, but rejected the possibility of introducing random testing. However, it is time for the House to make a decision. It is a controversial matter involving balancing the civil rights of the individual and the rights of people to be defended from those who take irresponsible and criminal actions. The House has constantly had good debates on the subjects of abortion, seat belts and hanging, which all involve important principles. It has often been rightly said that the House is at its best when it has such debates.

In many ways, while it is Opposition policy to introduce random testing, I hope that the possibility of giving the House a free vote will be considered. I suggested that in Committee when the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was Secretary of State. As he knows, three or four hon. Members supported my suggestion in Committee in those early days in the 1970s. Now, the opportunity for such a vote must be provided in the House. In the past, votes have been held in Committee, but there has never been a chance for the whole House to vote on the matter.

The arguments are overwhelming, as the figures show. In 1988, one in six road deaths involved drink-driving, which was responsible for killing 950 and injuring 25,000. There were 120,000 convictions for drink-driving, nearly all the defendants lost their licences and 4,000 went to prison. More than half the drivers and motor bike riders killed on roads between 10 pm and 4 am were over the legal limit. In 1987, the cost of road accidents was £4 billion. Since the introduction of the breathalyser in 1967, the number of excess alcohol detections has quadrupled. The breathalyser has been a success because it has reduced the number of deaths and accidents, as is well proven.

Therefore, the argument before us is whether we should go further and introduce random testing. At present, the police make it clear that they intend to carry out what is basically random testing. In *The Independent* on

Wednesday 5 December, Commander David Ray of New Scotland Yard made the following statement to warn drivers;

"You will be tested if you are involved in a road accident, whether you are at fault or not, or you commit a moving traffic offence and a police officer suspects you have been drinking or you are drunk in charge of a vehicle, even if it is parked."

The last two policies are exactly the same as they are now, but the first policy shows that police will now act as they feel fit, whether or not there is anything wrong with the vehicle. Parliament has not agreed that policy.

It has been said that we should leave it to the discretion of the chief constables. I have a list of all the chief constables in different parts of the country; some believe in random testing and some think that it is not so important. Let us look at the scale of random testing—that is, what is occurring, but without approval from the House. In Nottingham in 1988, there were 32,800 screen testings, in Merseyside—a similar police force—there were 4,700 testings. It depends where one is in the country whether one is subjected to such screening. We should have one uniform policy on that. If we decide to allow random testing, cars should be stopped under uniform conditions in all parts of the United Kingdom. Cars should not be stopped merely for road testing. The questions of when, how and if the driver will be able to appeal against the decision should be contained in legislation; we should not leave such issues solely to the discretion of chief constables and I am surprised that hon. Members believe that we should.

Experiments clearly show that wherever random testing has been introduced—Australia, Austria, south Wales and various other countries—there tends to be a reduction in deaths and accidents of about 35 per cent. If we were to introduce random testing, many hundreds of deaths and serious injuries could be prevented. I am not aware of all the evidence, but I appeal to the Secretary of State to ask his Department to look at all the evidence and provide detailed information for the Committee stage so that we can make some assessment of it.

I am always confused when I hear that people are worried about whether the police have too much power and discretion. In the road safety debate on 16 November, the Minister for Roads and Traffic said:

"The police have tremendous discretion and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said earlier this year, it is appropriate to leave the law as it is. I emphasise that there were 22 per cent. more breath tests last year than there were the year before. If the police continue at that rate, it will not be long before we have 1 million breath tests a year."

That means that the number of breath tests will have doubled from 500,000 to 1 million. The Minister continued that, in those circumstances,

"One can always make a case for increasing police powers, but we should be cautious about giving greater discretion to the police in this matter."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 815.]

The police have discretion which varies from district to district.

The House is prepared to press for votes on hanging —we are about to have one—when there are about 500 murders a year. Some hon. Members are prepared to bring in hanging, presumably as a deterrent—I have heard very few of them argue the case for retribution. Therefore, in this case, where more lives could be saved by one simple action, the House should pay equal attention to saving lives by bringing in random testing, for which there is a powerful argument, and I find it difficult to understand why it does not do so.

The Department contains two "hangers" and two Ministers who voted against hanging. Therefore, perhaps the Department is equally balanced. The House should at least be given the opportunity to vote on random testing. Let us hear the available evidence and have a debate, just as the House will have a vote on hanging——

Mr. Greg Knight (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Not random hanging.

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that the parents of children killed in drink-driving cases will not find the hon. Gentleman's remark very clever. People do not understand how, despite the big majorities against hanging, the House returns to the subject every 12 to 18 months, but constantly refuses, year after year, to have a vote on breath testing. I assure the House that the Opposition will ensure that there will be a motion to debate that subject and an opportunity to settle the issue once and for all.

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman makes some important and powerful points with which the House will have a good degree of sympathy. Does he agree that the simplest solution to the problem of drink-driving is not one of law or the debate about the extent of the law and police powers? I agree that, in their enforcement of the law, police officers should have standardised procedures. However, is not the answer to use the modern technology available to prevent people with alcohol on their breath from starting the engine of a car?

Mr. Prescott: There is a role for technology, but I am sure that it is not beyond human wit and ingenuity to get round such proposals. I am all for welcoming any technology, whether related to red lights to stop people jumping the lights or speeding, but ultimately it is the deterrent, the chance of being caught, that is the most effective way of influencing people and persuading them not to drink and drive.

The options open to us are not limited to random testing; the blood alcohol level could be brought down to that recommended in Europe. The evidence shows that reducing the level would undermine people who think that they can have two pints or certain drinks, and still be below the limit. Such people are a problem. I understand the logic of the argument that we should not allow any drink, but we must live with reality and bring down blood alcohol levels.

In a pub yesterday I bought a lemonade for 85p. It is scandalous that, in the time of drink-driving laws, one pays as much for a glass of lemonade as for beer, when one person in a group may decide to drink lemonade, as many youngsters do. It is to the credit of youngsters that they are not the targets at which we aim legislation. It is aimed at those aged between 35 and 50, such as business executives, the A1 and A2 social classifications, including company directors and the higher echelons of society, including Members of Parliament.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham) *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: I have no intention of giving way to the hon. Gentleman. He had a number of remarks to make and I have received his apology. He was quite wrong to

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make the remarks he did in the road safety debate and I have no intention of giving way to him in this debate—he knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, sit down.

The changes proposed in respect of careless, dangerous and reckless driving, to which the Secretary of State referred, are good and proper, and are to be welcomed. However, there is concern about the quality of the advice given to the police on what constitutes careless, dangerous or reckless driving. The changes that North suggests are much more sensible.

Clause 3 refers to drink and drugs, but not to drivers affected by fatigue or sleepiness. The White Paper, "The Road User and the Law," makes reference to the offence of driving while unfit. It mentions

"drink, drugs . . . temporary incapacity due to fatigue, somnolence or temporary disability".

I cannot find those categories in the Bill. Incapacity through fatigue, and people driving for longer hours than they should, are important considerations. One can understand the difficulties of bringing charges under that heading, and perhaps that led the Secretary of State to omit it from the Bill.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will surely acknowledge that there is a high degree of culpability if someone drives under the influence of drink or drugs which they should have been aware they had consumed. Driving while suffering from excess fatigue does not, by its very nature, involve the same degree of culpability—and therefore falls to be treated differently.

Mr. Prescott: I was quoting from the Government's own White Paper, and Dr. North also considered the question of fatigue. Although it might be difficult to prove such an offence, perhaps the Secretary of State will address himself to that matter in Committee.

There is undoubtedly a causal link between speed and accidents. I have as much need to understand that as anyone else. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones. There is clear evidence of a correlation between speed, road accidents and deaths that no one can deny and legislators must bear it in mind when drafting new law. The Bill strikes the right balance in that respect. I look forward also to debating the role that technology can play, whether in stopping people from jumping traffic lights or driving at excessive speeds.

Use of deterrents is the most effective way of preventing road casualties and I hope that we shall be able to make progress with that. I am interested that the Government are giving consideration to introducing corporate liability, which I have advocated in many other areas. The Bill appears to confine the application of corporate liability to cases in which a company is required to reveal the identity of the driver of a firm's vehicle that has been involved in an accident. The Government now seem prepared to attach corporate liability to the firm that owns the car concerned. That leaves the controversial question whether, having fined the company, one or more of its directors will also be given penalty points. One wonders whether that would be acceptable and I look forward to debates in Committee on that aspect also.

I would like corporate liability extended to heavy goods vehicles. All too often we blame the worker—the driver involved in an accident that has occurred in difficult circumstances. The White Paper suggests that responsibility should not be taken from the driver, and that philosophy is reflected in the Bill. That will simply place the driver under greater pressure from the lorry owner.

The recent BBC "Watchdog" programme on lorries was a powerful piece of work, and clearly showed that of the 19 million cars in the United Kingdom, 5,000 are involved in fatal accidents each year, whereas the half a million lorries are involved in 1,000 fatal accidents. The number of fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles travelled is 1·7 in the case of cars, and 3·4 in the case of lorries—twice as many.

In 1989, 88,000 heavy goods vehicles were tested at the roadside, 16·5 per cent. of which were prohibited from continuing their journeys due to law-breaking defects—a total of 15,000 HGVs. In October 1989, 5,500 lorries were stopped in London, and one in 10—a total of 550—were unlicensed. Of the 100 lorries mechanically tested, 50 per cent. were faulty. Those are serious statistics.

There have already been complaints about ineffectual fines. The "Watchdog" programme also investigated the fines imposed on companies for running vehicles with defective tyres. The average fine was £150, which is less than the price of a single tyre for such vehicles. Also, one third of the HGVs in the sample failed their MOT the first time, and one quarter of them failed at the second attempt. I am glad that the Secretary of State is taking extra powers in the Bill to improve the standing of test stations. However, I hope that he will increase also the number of inspectors, because it has been falling over a period of time.

If there is corporate liability, we are then faced with the problem that many transport companies go bust the moment that any action is taken against them. Many are one-lorry firms. They automatically go bust and cannot be brought to law, yet they are the very people one wants to catch because they undermine the competition. The Road Haulage Association's recent report made it clear that it wants more prosecutions, and heavier penalties:

"It is recommended that vehicle confiscation would be a constructive move to terminate activities that have given rise to fly tipping, abuse of driver hours regulations, avoidance of vehicle excise duty, and environmental nuisance. Such a measure would have widespread support within the haulage industry and would be welcomed by the public at large."

Dr. North also spoke of vehicle confiscation, but no such provision is in the Bill. We intend giving powers to the transport inspectors, who will be able to confiscate an operating licence, but more should be done to penalise the owner.

As to tachographs, the United Road Transport Union under Frank Griffin wants a simple new measure, which could be provided in the Bill, to ensure that tachographs are properly numbered in sequence so that inspectors will more easily be able to locate them when bringing prosecutions. At the moment, a tachograph can simply be thrown in a box and it can be made very difficult to find that evidence. That small procedural change would improve the Bill.

I hope that the Secretary of State will consider also the plight of drivers who cannot gain access to service station facilities, including sleeping accommodation, and an opportunity to have a shave or take a shower. Lorries are banned from many such facilities, which leaves their

drivers tired and less alert, and makes it more probable that they will be involved in accidents. In the Birmingham area, the Transport and General Workers Union, under Dennis Mills, has been campaigning for change for a long time. Service stations depend on lorry drivers for their own supplies and livelihoods, as much of the British economy does, yet deny them decent facilities.

Part I at least is a great step forward, though my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford will have something to say about part II. I do not have time to talk about rear seat belts, but I know that the Department is probably about to make the wearing of them compulsory—and if that happens many more injuries and deaths will be prevented. If provisions on seat belts and random testing of drink driving are put into the Bill, they will save many hundreds of lives and thousands of serious injuries. They are worthy of consideration and of inclusion in a Bill devoted to road safety. Those two measures would make the Bill a far better piece of legislation.

5.59 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): As one who has campaigned for many years for effective measures to combat drinking and driving, I warmly welcome the Bill. May I also welcome the arrival of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to his new responsibilities, and the most constructive and challenging remarks made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)? I enjoyed both their speeches immensely.

Our country's record on drink-driving legislation is already good by international standards. But for two regrettable and notable omissions, the Bill would mark an advance that would make Britain a world leader in road safety. Much of my speech is related to those omissions. We have the time, the opportunity and, I hope, the will to remedy them.

In recent years we have learned that the problem of drinking and driving is not nearly as intractable as it once appeared, and that effective measures can be taken to reduce the toll of alcohol-related deaths and injuries on our roads—a toll that is as appalling as it is totally unnecessary. It is not so long ago since drinking and driving were hardly viewed as a crime in any real sense of the word—save by the victims and their relatives. Indeed, offenders were often regarded as deserving of sympathy—as people who were unlucky to have been caught. Thank God, all that has changed.

Here I should like to pay a special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), whose tireless work during his time in office as Minister for Roads and Traffic did so much to change public attitudes, and to prepare the way for some of the provisions in this Bill. On behalf of hon. Members on both sides of the House, I should also like to pay tribute to the campaign against drinking and driving. Its influence in the framing of the Bill is evident, especially in regard to the proposed new offences of dangerous driving and of causing death by drinking and driving. Greatly aided by the media—a measure of the seriousness with which people view this subject—the campaign has brought home to the British public, as never before, the full, sordid, human realities of the problems of drinking and driving, which are now almost universally recognised as extreme anti-social behaviour, tantamount to a threat of violence that strikes at random.

Yet despite the welcome progress of recent years, far too many lives are still being put at risk, or destroyed unnecessarily. Drinking and driving remains the single most important cause of death and injury on our roads, and that must be sharply reduced. Let us consider the figures. I think that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East mentioned some of them. The year before last, one in six road deaths happened in an accident involving drink-driving; 840 people were killed and about 22,000 people were injured on the roads in accidents in which drink driving was a factor. I do not believe that the latest figures would show very much improvement.

My anxiety about the Bill, which I know is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, concerns the extent to which the measures it proposes would help to prevent the social evil of drinking and driving resulting in unacceptable death and injury, as distinct from the measures that seek to ameliorate the situation once the offence causing death or injury has occurred. The Bill proposes improved, or more appropriate, penalties for drinking and driving. Welcome though they are, I am aware of little evidence that increasing the severity of penalties alone has any significant effect in reducing the number of such offences.

Naturally, I fully support the proposed new offence of causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs, but the justification for that proposal is not that it will act as a deterrent but that it is justice—that is, "justice" in inverted commas. That may remedy the defect in the existing law, which results in many drink-drivers who kill other road users being charged and convicted only of driving with an excess of alcohol in their blood. The campaign against drinking and driving has campaigned for that much-needed reform for some years but, frankly, like the campaigners, I fear that that will not, of itself, prevent further deaths.

The campaign secretary, Mr. Graham Buxton, in a letter that many of us recently received, said that that clause of the Bill

"satisfies the demands of justice but not of prevention."

There is a simple explanation for that. When he sets off on his journey, no driver believes that he will cause an accident. If he believed that he would not drive; he would not even begin. Instead he is unthinking—sozzled—he is sozzled because he is unthinking.

I greatly welcome the proposal for a major experiment in education courses for drink-drive offenders. Almost exactly 10 years ago, when I was still chairman of the National Council on Alcoholism, in a Second Reading debate on the Transport Bill of 1981, I argued for just such a development and I am gratified to learn that it is finally to be introduced. It is pleasing, even after a decade, that something that one advocated all those years ago is now accepted. It is entirely right and proper that a person who has been convicted of a drink-driving offence should be expected to attend a rehabilitation course in his own as well as in the public interest.

However, I have some anxieties on that score. To my knowledge, there is little evidence that rehabilitation schemes, however desirable or successful they may be in certain cases in reducing recidivism, have any marked effect on the overall level of drink-drive accidents and casualties. Indeed, American research had estimated that

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even if all persons convicted of drinking and driving were prevented from repeating their offence, fatal crashes would decrease by 3 per cent. only.

Therefore, I am especially concerned about the Government's proposal to trade off attendance at rehabilitation courses against the period of disqualification. That is wholly the wrong approach. Licence suspension is the principle sanction against drinking and driving and, arguably, it will always be a more powerful tool than rehabilitation courses are likely to be in ensuring road safety. I trust, therefore, that the Government will reconsider that aspect of the Bill.

The Government hope that the Bill will be a major means of achieving their goal of a one third reduction in the number of road deaths and injuries by the end of the century. All of us share that aim. However, I am not optimistic in regard to the proposals on drinking and driving, and I shall tell the House why.

The first omission from the Bill is related to the legal limit. I find it strange that, as we embark on another publicity campaign exhorting the public not to drink and drive, the Government should insist on retaining a legal limit of 80 mg—substantially above what doctors and scientists have been telling us for a long time is the maximum compatible with road safety. For some years, the scientific consensus has been that a maximum of 50 mg of alcohol to 100 ml of blood is far more consistent with the known effects of alcohol on driving competence, and it is certainly more consistent with the message of the Government's own publicity campaign.

It is often said that we are now dealing— or attempting to deal—with the hard core of people who continue to drink and drive. No doubt we are; but that still seems to comprise a great many who have not been dissuaded by any publicity campaign. A survey carried out by Gallup for General Accident Insurance Group, released last week, found that 30 per cent. of all drivers—or 41 per cent. of all business drivers—admitted to drinking and driving. That is, of course, a minority of the driving population, but it is a very substantial minority. In fact the evidence suggests that the main factor influencing the behaviour of such people is not the size or nature of the penalty, but the perceived risk of being caught in the first place.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there has been an enormous change in attitudes over the past decade? Is not it now acceptable for people who are offered a drink to say, "No, I am driving"? Those who advocate random breath testing seem to ignore the fact that, according to the Department of Transport, that change in attitudes has reduced the number of drink-drivers by half. It was encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) when he was Minister for Roads and Traffic, with the co-operation of the brewers. Is not it wrong to ignore changes in public attitude, which have had more effect than any other factor?

Sir Bernard Braine: I do not know what my hon. Friend was doing earlier, when I thanked the Almighty for that very change in public attitudes. I was not born yesterday; I have been in the business of alcohol abuse for a long time. As I said, there have been changes, thank God—but obviously my hon. Friend did not hear me say it.

I am not talking about that; I am talking about the continued carnage on our roads. I do not know about my hon. Friend's constituency, but every now and again I have to face a constituent who has lost a loved one because of some drunken driver. I suspect that every hon. Member has experienced that, and it must cease. No mild words can be expected from me about what I regard as a disgrace.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) is tempting me to go into more detail. Regardless of the improvements in public perceptions and attitudes—which I do not deny—the principal failure of the Bill lies in the omission of a measure to deal with the aspect of the problem that I have just described. The Bill does not prevent the commission of the crime and the subsequent suffering of the victims' families, and in that respect it is inadequate.

Virtually the whole community—including the police and the overwhelming majority of the public—know what is required. I find it extraordinary that the Government have not included a clause to introduce random breath testing: experience in other countries strongly suggests that that would provide the single most effective means of reducing the number of alcohol-related deaths and injuries, thus achieving the Government's declared objective.

In Australia and the Nordic countries—countries whose societies are not far removed in character from our own—random breath testing has proved the principal counter-measure, and there is no reason to believe that it would not be effective in preventing drunken driving in Britain. Moreover, random testing carried out by means of properly authorised and designated roadside checkpoints provides built-in safeguards relating to the liberty of the subject and relations between the police and the motoring public. In that important respect as well as others, it is superior to our existing legal framework.

I am certain that, on reflection, many hon. Members will make the case for random testing during the Bill's progress through the House. I agree with the contention of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East that this matter concerns all Members of Parliament, wherever their constituencies may be. There should be a free vote on the issue—unless, of course, the Government recognise the strength and validity of my arguments and act accordingly.

I sincerely hope that the Government will listen. If they have a better proposal, we and the public outside would like to hear it, but I hope that they will think again about the omissions from the Bill before the Report stage. I do not deny that progress has been made—it would be dreadful if it had not—but that does not justify complacency or inconsistency.

On 16 November, speaking in the debate on road safety, my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic justified the Government's intention to enforce the wearing of rear seat belts on the ground that it would save 100 lives and prevent 1,000 injuries. He said:

"With such huge benefits available, we must not delay."
—*[Official Report*, 16 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 807.]

That is quite right—but, paradoxically, those words are in direct opposition to the Government's reaction to the proposal for random breath testing, although that would certainly prevent a much greater number of casualties.

I cannot comprehend why the Government continue to fly in the face of public opinion. I warn them, here and now, that the safety of innocent people using our roads

—young and old, in my constituency and in every other constituency in the land—must no longer be fettered by vested interests or faint-heartedness.

6.16 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It gives me particular pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the Father of the House. Nearly 40 years ago, as a student, I was responsible for assembling a non-party platform of Members of Parliament; the right hon. Gentleman travelled some distance to attend, along with some Labour Members. It is also a pleasure to follow him because I can endorse almost everything that he has said: I do not think that his logic can be faulted. He is entirely right in saying that the licensed trade is now showing a degree of enlightened self-interest. We should commend that and hope that it will show even more.

I have encountered a slogan which reads: "If you drink, do not drive; if you drive, do not drink". If we are not to copy the Swedes, who do not allow people to drink and drive at all, perhaps we should introduce a limit of 50 mg. Certainly there is a strong case for reducing the maximum to the level suggested by the right hon. Gentleman.

I have a third reason for welcoming the opportunity to follow the right hon. Gentleman. This is a non-party occasion. As far as I know—I cannot imagine why this should not be the case—both parts of the Bill involve good citizenship and good administration; it is relatively rare for such a measure to be debated on the Floor of the House.

I intend to address my remarks solely to part II. Before I do so, however, I should say that I consider it a scandal that we are debating part II at all. More than 20 years ago, I was involved in this very matter as a co-opted member of the GLC highways and traffic committee, latterly the planning and transport committee. This should be a matter not for the House of Commons but for a properly constituted London authority. Alas, there is no properly constituted London authority. The former Secretary of State for Scotland, who is now the Secretary of State for Transport for the United Kingdom, would not be very popular if he suggested that part of the traffic responsibilities for Glasgow should be handed over by statute to the civil servants in St. Andrew's house, Edinburgh. That, in effect, will be the result of this measure.

The Government will have to do something about traffic in London. Unfortunately, there is no Greater London council or any other London-wide authority that is sufficiently competent to deal with it. We have to ask whether the Bill deals with the right priorities and whether the measure will work. My answer is no to both questions.

London has clearways that were established about 20 years ago. Locally elected people—in both the Greater London council and the boroughs—spent much time considering how they could be established. Bit by bit, clearways were established. A great deal has changed since the old red zones that were established by Mr. Marples. About 20 years ago a gyratory traffic management system was instituted. Parking is controlled. There are traffic wardens and linked sets of lights. Moreover, co-ordinated traffic management was achieved by the GLC before it was abolished. That led to equilibrium. I understood at the time from the traffic engineers that the flow of traffic, measured in passenger car units per hour over the network, increased by 25 to 30 per cent. without the construction of any major new roads. The aim was to keep traffic flowing to the maximum possible extent, taking into account the physical limits of the roads.

Leaving aside the controversy over the creation of additional new roads, it was accepted at that time—and it still is—that Professor Buchanan's thesis in his epoch-making "Traffic in Towns" was right: that if we provide even more facilities we generate even more traffic and even more congestion. We need to create equilibrium. Public transport facilities must also be included if we are to reduce congestion to a minimum and improve to the maximum possible extent the flow of all means of transport.

Whatever we do, however, there will always be congestion at times. That is inevitable, for a number of reasons. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves how it can be minimised. That would lead to a reduction in delays. People quite properly object to delays. There are massive and terrible delays in London at times. Generally speaking, however, the big delays are not caused by traffic. That may be so occasionally, due to a football match or other public events. Congestion is usually caused by a number of other factors. Accidents cause delays. Unfortunately, there will always be accidents. Mechanical breakdowns, shed loads and the routine renewal of roads also cause delays. Those are different from the routine renewal of the infrastructure. Moreover, emergency work causes delays. Burst water mains are in a category of their own. They cause delays at the time and the hole that is made in the road takes a long time to repair. Traffic light failures cause delays, as do official events, particularly in central London. Demonstrations lead to delays. An increasing number of delays are caused by vehicles parking by building sites, and by vehicles entering or leaving those sites.

Another cause of delay is illegal parking. Such parking —and parking of any kind, if it is allowed—is only one of all the reasons that I have mentioned. Nevertheless, it is the major issue on which part II is predicated. The red routes are designed to increase traffic flows along certain designated roads in the former GLC area where congestion occasionally occurs. A traffic director is to be appointed for that purpose. I have tried to demonstrate, however, that the flow of traffic on such roads is influenced by a whole host of considerations. The needs of local people—pedestrians, for example, and cyclists—must be taken into account. If traffic flow is to be the only criterion, with no account taken of other legitimate balancing factors, we shall place the wrong emphasis on the director's duties.

Many hon. Members will remember Mr. Bob Bean, a former Member of Parliament for Rochester. Alas, he died early. Bob Bean was a local authority man of great experience. The best story told about him concerns the time when he attended a road engineer's demonstration of a new gyratory system for the middle of his home town of Chatham. The road engineer said, "We are going to have this slip road here and that gyratory there; the flow of vehicles will increase by X per cent., the buses will come in there and speed will increase on average from X to Y miles per hour." The road engineer looked at Mr. Bean, because he knew his Member of Parliament, and said, "And what do you suppose we will do for the pedestrians?" "Give 'em starting blocks" said Bob Bean. All too often in the past

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

that has been the attitude of some road engineers. I hope that that will not happen, but the emphasis on traffic flow alone suggests that it will.

Other measures ought to be taken immediately. Part II contains 24 clauses. It is a complex measure. Conservative Members often ask why we need so much legislation. The Secretary of State for Transport could implement certain measures straight away. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) who was responsible for these matters. The A13 in east London was blocked for months on end. When it was being widened at one point, there was only one traffic lane; vehicles travelled at between six and 10 mph through the cones.

I wrote to the hon. Gentleman to find out why that was so. I found out that it was because the contract for that stretch of road contained no requirement that minimum flows should be maintained. The hon. Gentleman changed that. I hope that what he achieved will be achieved elsewhere. It ought to be written into all contracts. I realise that it will cost money and that the Government do not like spending money. However, the congestion on that stretch of the A13 caused immense delays for weeks and months on end in Newham.

There was trouble with the Blackwall tunnel. Again, I suppose that it was because the Government wanted to save money. One of the tunnels was closed at weekends, which led to terrific traffic jams throughout east London. One does not expect congestion on Sunday afternoons, but buses and private cars had to endure hours of delay. Further renewal of the Blackwall tunnel is now being undertaken and it is carried out without closing one of the tunnels. The work is taking a long time because it is being done at night. The hon. Member for Eltham was again responsible for reducing what would otherwise have been great congestion. He used common sense. Unfortunately, common sense is not used in many similar places.

I have spent a good deal of time with the Metropolitan police talking about congestion in the London area. Not so long ago there were terrible jams in this area. One reason for the congestion was that when road works were being carried out on the embankment, the right hand turn into Northumberland avenue was not rephased on the lights. It would have been common sense to do so, but nothing was done about it. I understand that the Metropolitan police do not have a central traffic division, so even they experience difficulties.

The police are not mentioned in clause 38, but they are the people on the job and they have been given a rather difficult job. Co-ordination with local authorities does not work The other Sunday in Newham, Bishop road and Commercial road were reduced to one lane, delaying the buses for half an hour or more. There was not a policeman in sight. I got on to Scotland Yard, which said, "The borough did not let us know; it is an unauthorised closure of the road." It is a question of nitty gritty. Planning is not done in London, but it should be. If it were, the proportion of avoidable delays would decrease.

Earlier, I listed some of the causes of delays. About a year ago, I asked the Department to give a breakdown of the general causes of major delays. Not every cause can be identified, but it did not know; the research had not been done. I am not saying that figures could be given to the nearest percentage, but at least some analysis should be done or Scotland Yard should be given the resources to do it.

The purpose of clause 38, I suppose, is to show that the Secretary of State is doing something about a problem of which hon. Members are only too well aware. I am saying to him, first, that much can be done and, secondly, that the clause will not work in any case. The hapless traffic director will not be the traffic director. He will look after only the red routes, about which, as I know from my involvement in the clearways, there will be plenty of controversy. It took much time and patience. If the director is to have reserve powers and to be able to crash through, as I suspect he will—I regret that my confidence in the Department of Transport is somewhat limited, but one goes as far as one can—there will be trouble. The poor chap does not have enough powers. Under clause 37, he will have powers "in relation to" the red routes. There will be arguments about whether a road is a red route or not, but, having so designated it, he has powers not over traffic that is on the red route but traffic that is "in relation to" it. There is hardly a road in London that does not come within that category.

Will the Secretary of State—I know he has come from Scotland to take up his new job and may not know the answer, but perhaps someone will tell him—say whether the traffic director has control of the traffic system? Following the demise of the GLC, there is layer upon layer of organisation for the maintenance of traffic lights in London, which are controlled quite properly by computer. I believe that they are now controlled by a unit for the City of London. I am not complaining about that, but saying that the traffic director will not have the powers that his name implies and the powers that he will have will be only partial because they will apply only to the red routes. Although there is a need to achieve good traffic flows, as I have suggested, those flows can be achieved in a far simpler, down to earth and efficient way.

I fear that I cannot support part II of the Bill, however much, in spirit, I support part I. They are really two separate Bills. I do not believe that the Bill will work in common-sense practice. I travel 4,000 miles in central London annually and I am able to look around and see what goes on. Will the Secretary of State please consult the people on the job, people in local authorities and the police? He may have done so already. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) is not here. I fear that the Bill will be of limited use and there there are much better ways of achieving its aims without presenting the House with 24 clauses that will set up yet another body in London that we can do without.

6.34 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his appointment as Secretary of State for Transport. I do not wish to limit his political career, but I hope that he stays in the job for some time. Since I left the Department in September 1981, there have been no fewer than seven Secretaries of State for Transport. A Secretary of State every 15 months is a little too high. I warn my right hon. and learned Friend that, although I spent three years in opposition and two and a half years on the Government Front Bench, it brought me

no acceptance with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). Nevertheless, it is an important subject.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East—I do not know where he is—referred to my work on deregulating coach services. I have nothing to apologise for, because that provided good, cheap coach services up and down the country. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen opposed that all the way, and in retrospect it was sad that they did so.

On returning to this subject after almost a decade, what strikes me is how public opinion has shifted. It has shifted in respect of traffic offences and traffic restraint. Although I am a director of the National Freight Consortium, I wish to confine my remarks to motorists and passengers rather than freight.

In the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the prevailing view was that traffic laws should be enforced according to some unwritten code, that they were not like other offences and that they were not as serious as those offences. When I was at the Department, I initiated changes that distinguished between major and minor offences and introduced the points system. I therefore accept that some offences should be dealt with more administratively. There is no question about that, and I think that it is accepted by the public.

The other side of the coin is that other traffic offences are undoubtedly criminal. They cause danger, injury and death to the public. Among those, drinking and driving is unquestionably one of the most serious. I entirely back the introduction of all the new offences in the Bill, none more so than causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink. Public opinion rightly condemns such offences and it is entirely right that ' law should set out the consequences for such motorists.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) eloquently stated, we should now go one step further and have the so-called random tests, about which over the years we have been rather equivocal. I heard the defence uttered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State—I have uttered it myself in the past—that the police do not need such powers. The argument is that if the police have reasonable suspicion, they can stop a car in any event. In some circumstances, that seems to rule out the universal roadside check. If it does not do so, there can be no argument against clarifying the law so that the public know what the legal position is. We are getting into a rather curious position on random tests. We are being told that the power to require random tests exists—we are being told that in the House—but the public are not being told that.

It is not satisfactory to talk with two voices on the issue. If we want random tests, there should be clear provision for them in legislation and that should be clear to the police and the public. The prospect of such checks on Friday and Saturday nights would have quite an impact on conduct in city and town centres. Many of us deplore the present behaviour. A new look at the issue of random checks should be on the agenda of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

My major contention is that, whatever the law is, it should be enforced. At present, traffic laws are not enforced extensively. Anyone who doubts that has only to wait for the snow to lift and the roads to return to normal and then conduct an experiment on the M1 or M6, without contraflows. We all know that any motorist who sticks to a steady 70 mph will be overtaken by a great flow of traffic going faster. I am not attacking the police—I recognise that our means of enforcing traffic laws have not been kept up to date.

I welcome the fact that the Bill enables photographic evidence of a speeding car to be used. No doubt that will be attacked outside the House as not quite cricket—if cricket analogies can still be used in the political world. The function of enforcing speed limits will never be entirely carried out by patrolling police cars. The police have a range of other priorities that the public place high on the agenda. Photographs are a sensible way of checking speed. They are a random check, but they are likely to be a much greater deterrent to a motorist than being picked up by the occasional police patrol. Their use is not unknown in other countries. In the 1970s, when I wrote a book about the police in Europe, they were used in Germany, and I am sure that they still are.

My concern is about not just the motorways but the enforcement of traffic laws in our cities. On many main routes, congestion slows traffic, but many cars still speed along the side roads and residential roads whenever there is an opportunity. Some local authorities remain almost entirely reluctant to build traffic humps, although that power exists widely. It was first given under the Transport Act 1981, which I introduced. The danger in our cities and towns is to children, old people, pedestrians, cyclists and a range of our citizens who have just as many rights as motorists.

I support the red routes, which are introduced in the Bill, but with one proviso: I believe that, at the same time as those routes are introduced, efforts must be made to deal with traffic on side streets and residential streets. Action must be taken to exclude through traffic and bring down traffic speed. Although the red routes provision will apply only to London, my remarks apply to many other cities.

The congestion and general environment in London are a disgrace to a European capital city. In part, the chaos is inevitable, but when cities such as Birmingham invested in roads such as the Aston expressway, London stood back and did nothing. London faces the traffic projections of the 21st century with roads that are adequate to deal with the conditions of the 19th century. We may regret that, but there is not much that we can do about it now. The opportunity has gone and I cannot think of any road building scheme that will bring relief to London this century.

The inevitable question is how to deal with commuting motorists coming to London in the morning, usually one to a car, and leaving in a great traffic jam in the evening. The red routes are a major part of the Government's strategy. Sympathetic though I am to that proposal, it is only a partial solution, as I said when it was discussed. It is just conceivable that the prospect of open roads will attract more cars into the city, not fewer. If that is not the intention—it should not be our aim—we must do something more about parking restrictions.

I shall listen carefully to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), although I should counsel her against regarding this as a knockabout, party political issue. I live in Sutton Coldfield and in London, where I live in Hammersmith and Fulham. That Labour borough provides free, unrestricted parking for commuters throughout much of its length. In vast stretches of the borough there are no parking meters or parking restrictions. I am therefore delighted to hear that the hon.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

Member for Kingston upon Hull, East favours greater use of public transport, but his views would carry greater conviction if we did not have Labour councils providing the obvious means of escaping using public transport or paying a price for using roads.

I assume that that issue can be tackled in due course. I hope that the Labour Front Bench will seek to do so. But this still leaves the question of traffic restraint in general. The least convincing part of "Traffic in London" dealt with traffic restraint. I am less than overwhelmed by the argument on road pricing, that we face

"major problems for which there are no easy answers".

That summarises the challenge that faces all central Governments and all local authorities on all issues. I do not see how we can cope in London and, conceivably, in some of our major cities and towns without some restraint on the motorist.

Over the next 10 or 20 years, we face a major increase in traffic. Car use will increase dramatically. We should recognise that the car gives the individual a freedom that he values. I, for one, value the car highly. But life is about balancing freedoms. It does not follow that a motorist's freedom extends to the absolute right to drive into the middle of an already congested city free of charge. Whether by supplementary licensing or by some form of electronic road pricing, we should urgently study the different methods used in other countries and consider how they could apply here. It is for the Government to lead such a study and discussion.

It is argued that the beneficiaries of such a road pricing policy should include passenger transport and other road users such as pedestrians, and I broadly agree. Bus services, for example, would substantially benefit if commuter traffic were reduced and the main routes kept open. I do not turn my back on the idea that some of the revenue from such a pricing policy should go to passenger services. Equally, I hope that more pavement space will be given to pedestrians, and, above all, that cities will be given back to the people who live in them.

Whatever changes are made, the law will have to be enforced. Part of the Bill deals with local authority parking attendants—as opposed to traffic wardens employed by the police. The Bill makes a number of sensible changes, but I am unimpressed by the gradations in the work of the enforcement authorities. Parking attendants can enforce regulations governing permitted parking but cannot enforce controls on illegal parking. Traffic wardens can enforce controls on illegal parking but cannot do anything about moving traffic offences. The police can do everything but will never have the time to enforce all the traffic laws. The time has come to see how we can break down some of those barriers and whether we can develop some form of unified traffic corps for cities such as London, so that all the traffic laws can be enforced all the time.

My main message to the new Secretary of State is this: I believe that we need radical solutions in transport, whether we are dealing with traffic offenders or with the chaos in some of our cities. I also believe—and this is most significant—that the public today are prepared to accept such radical solutions. There has been a great change in attitude since the 1970s and early 1980s. I wish my right hon. and learned Friend well and I hope that he will urgently consider those radical solutions. If he does, he will go down in history as a great Secretary of State for Transport. I hope that that will be his future.

6.51 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I shall deal mainly with clauses 1 and 3 but, before doing so, I wish to comment on corporate liability, particularly as it relates to fatigue. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) raised the matter in his expert review of the contents of the Bill and the measures that we should consider during its passage to deal with drink-driving. He also referred to the need for new legislation governing the involvement of the police. We must find some way of intervening, while maintaining the balance of personal rights, to ensure the protection of the general public.

Last week I discovered for myself the dangers of fatigue. On Tuesday morning I took part in an early morning programme on Radio 4. The BBC sent a private hire minicab to my flat to collect me. Within 10 minutes of our leaving the flat, the driver had twice been on the wrong side of the road. On the second occasion, I asked him whether he felt unwell and whether there was anything I could do for him. He told me that he had been driving all night and all the previous evening and that I was his last customer. He promised me that when he dropped me off, he would go home to bed. Within minutes of the conversation, the taxi driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. He went through a red light and involved us in an accident. There was severe damage to both cars, but the minicab driver, the driver of the other vehicle and I were lucky: we came out with a few bumps and bruises, a sore neck and a sore back. That incident brought home to me the effects of our inability to police the arrangements, allowing someone to drive for hours on end, to the point at which his fatigue becomes a danger to himself, his passengers and the travelling public. Were it not for pure luck, I should not have been taking part in this debate. I should have been just another figure in the statistics of those killed in road accidents.

Fatigue can kill and it can cause accidents. It is vital that we should legislate to implement practical solutions to deal with the problem. The tachograph is one possibility, although I know that it is controversial in both the public and private sectors of transport. We should seriously consider its introduction into the minicab and private hire businesses because it could act as a deterrent. We cannot allow employers to force their employees to work long unsociable hours—perhaps 10 or 12 hours on end—without having any liability in the event of an accident. We should also ensure that those who drive licensed black cabs work sociable and safe hours and cannot be forced to do otherwise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East also referred to corporate liability as it affects the owners of heavy goods vehicles and their ability to force their employees to drive dangerous vehicles. I used to organise the private office of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott). One day, the driver of a heavy goods vehicle owned by Calor Gas came to our office. He had been taken on on a temporary contract and told that, if he came up to scratch at the end of the period of that contract, he would be taken on as a full-time regular employee. Some days earlier, he had been stopped by a

police officer and advised that his vehicle was seriously overloaded. He was told that he must return to the depot immediately or face prosecution. The driver complied with that request and returned to the depot in Wigan. The depot manager told him that he must take the vehicle back out or face suspension. He replied that he was not prepared to do what was requested of him because the police had told him that the load was unsafe and in contravention of the Road Traffic Acts. He was not suspended; he was sacked on the spot for failing to obey the depot manager's orders.

I am sure that such occurrences are not unusual. The gentleman concerned had no recourse to an employment tribunal because he was a temporary employee. He had no redress for the fact that his employer had tried to force him to act illegally. Despite an exchange of letters between my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan and the managing director of Calor Gas, that individual was never reinstated. He had to sign on unemployed and seek employment elsewhere in the industry. Such behaviour on the part of employers is quite unacceptable, and I am sure that that case is only the tip of the iceberg. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East found in his own survey, a substantial number of heavy goods vehicles should not be on the road and should not be allowed to return to the road. There is absolutely no doubt that corporate liability is involved. After all, it is not the decision of the driver to take a dangerous vehicle on the roads. The Secretary of State owes it to the House to consider my hon. Friend's valid argument about corporate liability.

I wholeheartedly support the concept and principle behind clauses 1 and 3. Unlike hon. Members who have been here for many years, I cannot claim that I have regularly campaigned for those changes in the House. As a member of the public, I concluded many years ago that the House must take drastic action in relation to drinking and driving. I thought that the House should review the law so that it acts as a deterrent and, when the deterrent does not work, the person responsible for the accident, injury or death should pay in an adequate fashion.

As the law stands at the moment, someone can kill an individual and get off with a fine of only a few hundred pounds even if that person had several other serious convictions against his name and had a long record of having killed or maimed people on the road. Therefore——

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *under Standing Order No. 16 (Time for taking private business), further proceedings stood postponed.*

King's Cross Railways Bill

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the King's Cross Railways Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bill shall be presented to this House not later than the seventh day after this day;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of this House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of this House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the Session 1988-89 which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within Session 1988-89 or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): The motion before the House is straightforward. It seeks to revive the King's Cross Railways Bill in the same form as it was last debated in the House. It may be helpful if I summarise briefly the principal purposes of the legislation.

First, the Bill provides for a new passenger concourse to serve both King's Cross and St. Pancras stations, replacing the present temporary structure for which planning permission expires in 1995. It will also provide greatly improved facilities for passengers using the two stations. Secondly, it provides for a new link between the east coast main line and St. Pancras station, so that the spare capacity at the latter can relieve the present limitations on capacity at King's Cross. Thirdly, it expands the capacity of the Underground station to reduce congestion and improve interchange between the Underground and British Rail. Fourthly, it will connect the east coast main line to Thameslink so that through-Network SouthEast services can operate from Cambridgeshire and west Norfolk to Gatwick airport, Sussex and Kent. Fifthly, it allows for the construction of a low-level station for Thameslink and for international services running from London and the north of England and Scotland via the channel tunnel to Paris and Brussels.

The House strongly endorsed the Bill's Second Reading last May by 211 votes to 41 and it has been exhaustively examined by a Committee under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). The Committee sat in public for a record 51 days, as Committee members will vividly recall, spread over a year, and it made several amendments which were

[Mr. Gary Waller]

fully accepted by the promoters. The House will, of course, have an opportunity to reflect on those when the Bill is considered, and on Third Reading, before it moves to another place.

In giving attention to this revival motion, some hon. Members may be concerned at the continuing delay and uncertainty surrounding the future of the rail link between Folkestone and London. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), then Secretary of State for Transport, announced the safeguarding of the eastern end of the route between Folkestone and the Medway in September this year and British Rail is currently studying route options between there and King's Cross. It is considering not only its own proposed routes through south-east London, but also proposals from other interested parties involving an approach through east London. However, it is worth recalling that whatever route is chosen, both British Rail and Ove Arup have endorsed the need for it to run to King's Cross.

On 14 June my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Transport said:

> "There seems to be general agreement that any service will need to terminate at King's Cross. In our view, nothing in this statement invalidates the benefits to British Rail of the House proceeding with the King's Cross Bill."—[*Official Report*, 14 June 1990; Vol. 174, c. 483.]

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): As far as my constituents in the north-west are concerned, this is an extremely important Bill. Will my hon. Friend use his undoubted influence with British Rail to impress on the company the fact that it appears to have seriously underestimated the number of passenger journeys and the amount of freight that is likely to use the line? Will he ask British Rail whether it would be good enough to up its ideas to other forecasts and provide more trains as that would be of enormous assistance to my area in the north-west?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. When the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) responds to that intervention, I am sure that he and all hon. Members will bear in mind that we are considering a revival motion, so the debate is on a procedural point. I appreciate that to make out an argument for or against the motion there must be some reference to the Bill's merits, but that should be somewhat restricted.

Mr. Waller: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman) that this is an important measure, and she will agree that it is vital that the revival motion be accepted so that she and others have opportunities to make their points. I agree that King's Cross is, in a sense, the hub of links between the north of England and London. It is important that British Rail should bear in mind the need to provide sufficient services to cater for the many people wishing to travel by rail between the north and south.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Can the hon. Gentleman throw any light on last week's news that there will be a substantial delay in the running of through trains from continental Europe to the north-east of England via King's Cross? Does that delay arise from these proceedings, or is there some other reason for it? The answer to that would help us to know whether we should support or oppose this revival motion.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the fact that there appears to be a delay in the delivery of the international trains capable of running between the continent and the north of England and Scotland. British Rail is committed to providing those trains as soon as possible, and tenders will be sought within a month. Only one consortium—GEC Alsthorn—is capable of building those trains, and unfortunately it cannot deliver them before June 1993. However, money is not a problem. In the interim, trains will run from the north of England and Scotland to Waterloo to connect with trains from London to Paris and Brussels. As the hon. Gentleman said, there will be a delay and the trains will not be available before 1993, but that in no way reduces BR's commitment to provide those trains. The Bill is necessary to ensure that an expanded King's Cross will be available—at a later date than the international trains. It will probably take six years to construct the low-level station and its associated facilities once the preliminary legislation and other planning requirements are in place.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I realise that the hon. Gentleman has picked up the baton from his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who has gone on to greater things. Perhaps that is a harbinger for the career prospects of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). However, the hon. Gentleman said that King's Cross was the only location that British Rail was willing to consider for the new station. I take it that the hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to read the report of the Select Committee which considered the King's Cross Railways Bill and which clearly stated that "it regretted that it was not in its remit to hear detailed evidence about the suitability of Stratford" in my constituency as an alternative. That is a failing in the Bill, and also in this whole procedure, and that is why I shall oppose the revival motion.

Mr. Waller: It is interesting that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), like my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman), who originally took over responsibility for sponsoring the Bill through the House, has been promoted to the Whips Office.

With only one exception, all those who have suggested that an alternative route should be provided from Folkestone to link up with London and go on to the north of England and Scotland have agreed that a central London interchange is required and that it should be at King's Cross. That certainly goes for Ove Arup.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The hon. Gentleman talked about the number of trains which might go to the north-east or to Scotland. When the Bill was last before the House British Rail talked of three trains a day. Has that number increased or decreased?

Mr. Waller: I am conscious of Mr. Deputy Speaker's injunction, but as yet British Rail has made no change in its plans. It has stated clearly on numerous occasions that it will monitor the demand for services and will respond speedily to that demand.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In relation to consideration of the revival motion, it might be pertinent for hon. Members to know when British Rail expects to make its announcement about the continued route from the channel tunnel beyond the boundary between Kent and [illegible] London. I have informal indications, but if the hon. Gentleman were able to give the House a clearer and more express indication—I am not trying to put him on the spot as he may not be able to do so—it would be helpful. Some hon. Members think that what happens at King's Cross is entirely or highly related to the line from the channel tunnel and to alternative stations for the terminus for traffic from the channel tunnel port, and whether King's Cross or Stratford should be bigger or smaller relates to a timetable which, as yet, is formally secret. Can the hon. Gentleman help us?

Mr. Waller: British Rail clearly maintains that, regardless of any future plans about the link—I am sorry that I am not able to enlighten the hon. Gentleman any further about the possible date for a future announcement—the requirement for an expanded King's Cross station, or King's Cross and St. Pancras station with a new concourse serving both, will still exist. The requirement for that improvement in station facilities arises not only from new international services, which will certainly come into existence before any new link is constructed, but from Thameslink services and the existing link between King's Cross and the north of England and Scotland. The need for the revival motion to be passed exists regardless of any future announcement which may or may not be made about the link from King's Cross to Folkestone.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waller: I am reluctant to give way at this stage. My hon. Friends will have opportunities to make their own points later. If my hon. Friends will forgive me, I should like to proceed with my speech, which may enlighten them or at least set the scene for the debate.

I stress again that, even in the interim period before the rail link is built, international trains could reach King's Cross via an upgraded Thameslink route which crosses the river at Blackfriars. Again, I stress the importance of the Bill to domestic rail and Underground services.

The other major announcement since the House last considered the Bill was that made by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), relating to crossrail—the new underground line between Paddington and Liverpool street, linking Network SouthEast services in London. Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), may consider that that strengthens the claim of Stratford to be reconsidered as an international terminal, and when crossrail is completed it will certainly offer better access to central London from Stratford than exists at present on the overcrowded Central line, but Stratford can never offer the substantial advantages available at King's Cross, which is well served by other BR and underground lines and is easily accessible from central London by bus and taxi.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Waller: King's Cross will be better served by bus and taxi when the Bill is passed and the new facilities are in operation. As well as accommodating through trains——

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waller: I am reluctant to give way again, but I will give way one last time.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way on this specific point. The evidence presented to the Select Committee which considered the King's Cross Railways Bill indicated that at peak hours traffic in the King's Cross area would increase by 75 per cent. How can bus and taxi access to King's Cross possibly be improved as a result of a Bill which will generate that much increased traffic?

Mr. Waller: There has been some debate on the matter. King's Cross has such a wide range of InterCity, Network SouthEast, and London Underground services that relatively few international passengers would use private cars and taxis for access to and from the terminal. British Rail's road traffic consultants have advised that the additional vehicles generated by the international station can be accommodated by the local main road network, allowing for growth caused by the King's Cross railways land development. British Rail is also in discussion with the Department of Transport and local boroughs on possible trunk road alterations, coupled with measures to improve the environment in side streets.

As well as accommodating through trains from Paris and Brussels to the north of England and Scotland, King's Cross will provide excellent interchange for international passengers, with InterCity services to the east midlands, Yorkshire, the north-east and Scotland, and with Network SouthEast trains to the north of London, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

In a separate Bill, the promoters are seeking powers for a short connecting line to link the west coast main line with King's Cross so as to allow international trains to run via the new station to the west midlands and the north-west. That will be welcome information for my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman has said that one of the promoters, British Rail, is introducing a separate Bill allegedly to meet its promise, which this Bill does not, to assist in respect of through services to the north-west. Will the hon. Gentleman make any reference to the King's Cross Bill being promoted by London Underground, which is one of the joint promoters of the Bill, or will he leave the House in ignorance of the fact that it is promoting a Bill which is directly related to this Bill and which includes a clause identical to clause 19 of this Bill which the Committee unanimously rejected and threw out?

Mr. Waller: It is well known that London Underground is a joint promoter. In a separate Bill, which was deposited last month, London Regional Transport is seeking powers for new subway links at King's Cross. Those powers are being sought in a separate Bill because of the urgent need to carry out the works to meet the recommendations of the Fennell report. Other changes in

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the Underground station—for instance, a new and larger ticket hall and better connections to main line stations—remain part of this Bill.

The principles of the Bill were firmly endorsed on Second Reading and the project had a thorough and detailed examination in Committee. At the end of last Session, there was not time to pass a motion to carry the Bill over. The motion seeks only that the Bill should be revived in this Session so that those deliberations can be properly concluded.

7.19 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I begin by expressing my considerable concern, because I understand that Conservative Members are on a two-line Whip. This is a private Bill, which is being promoted by British Rail. Therefore, the motion should be left to the free decision of hon. Members of all parties. If Conservative Members are indeed on a two-line Whip for any votes that may come later, it behoves the House to ask the Government whether they are now proposing and promoting the Bill and whether it is now Government policy, because if it is——

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to let pass this opportunity to correct his misapprehension. This is private business and there is no Government Whip on any votes that may take place on this business.

Mr. Smith: I have to accept in good faith what the Minister says. However, several of the Minister's hon. Friends appear to be under the impression that that was the case. If the Government are actively backing the Bill, my constituents will want to be very clear that that is happening.

A further technical point needs to be raised at the outset. The Select Committee, which considered the Bill and placed its report before the House on 26 June—the report has yet to be debated as have any amendments arising from it—will have to meet again to consider the amendments that the Committee itself has said that it wishes to table together with those amendments that it is requiring British Rail to make. Four hon. Members served on the Select Committee and did a sterling job in listening to many hours of debate and discussion. Although I demur from its central conclusion that the Bill should proceed, the Committee's report nonetheless made a number of extremely valuable and trenchant points, especially about British Rail's conduct throughout this saga. I understand that two of those Back-Bench Members have now received positions of some importance in Government ranks. Is it therefore possible that the original Committee that considered the Bill might have to change its membership further to consider the Bill if we give the carry-over motion the go-ahead tonight?

That is an important point, because a Select Committee that examines a private Bill must be composed of Back-Bench Members who have no direct involvement in the matters under discussion. It would be useful for the House to know from the Government, the promoters or, in due course, from yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the exact constitutional position in the House if a Select Committee on a private Bill has to reconvene but two of its members have a different standing in the House from what they had when the Bill was originally considered by them.

I have never made any secret of my strong opposition to the Bill and to the manner in which British Rail has promoted it. The King's Cross terminus will destroy homes, jobs and businesses in my constituency. It will create traffic chaos and congestion. It will not sensibly serve the north, the north-west and Scotland, despite the claims which British Rail has consistently and erroneously made to the contrary. Furthermore, the Bill is still being actively promoted before any firm decisions about the high-speed link have been taken. I remain very much of that basic view about the Bill's inadequacies.

There are also a number of specific reasons why I believe that the Bill should not be carried over for further consideration this Session. First, British Rail is currently undertaking what is supposedly an independent review of all the various options both for the link from the channel to London and on the choice of King's Cross as the proposed location for the second international terminus. That investigation is being carried out by the Rail Link Project. We must question how a proper assessment of the options for the high-speed link and for the London terminus for channel tunnel traffic can be carried out if the outcome of that assessment is effectively predetermined by this Bill continuing to progress. That is exactly what will happen. If the Bill progresses—if the Government put their backing behind it, and if it is clear that King's Cross is the choice for the location—the work that is being conducted by the Rail Link Project will not be worth the paper that it is written on. I suspect that it would be revealed for the charade that it really is—a sop to try to dampen the criticism—and not a real consideration of the alternative proposals for either the location of the station or the route to it from the channel.

I have so far received many papers from the Rail Link Project, relating especially to the work being carried out by PIEDA—the Planning, Industrial and Economic Advisers—on the socio-economic and development impacts of the different route options. One section entitled "Station Area Studies" states:

> "Each of the areas around proposed stations"—

presumably that must include King's Cross—

> "will have different characteristics: for example, in the labour market and housing market, in the planning and development context, and in the opportunities which the Rail Link might create."

That is indeed the case, because one argument about this issue is the way in which King's Cross would suffer rather than benefit from the terminus being located there, whereas an alternative location, such as Stratford, might well benefit economically and socially from the station being located there.

Those are important issues and I cannot see how they can be properly and independently considered without prejudice by the consultants appointed by British Rail if the Bill ploughs on at exactly the same speed as previously by means of this carry-over motion.

My second point is linked to the first. There is still no decision on the high-speed link or its funding. We do not know where it is to go or how it will be paid for. There have been some reports in the press in the past few days that the Government may be revising their view. The former Secretary of State for Transport said that, although there would be no public money for the high-speed link,

there might be some for commuter services, but even that was not stated firmly. However, we now read that the Government may be having second thoughts and that there may be some money for the high-speed link. It would be useful to know from the Minister whether that is the case and whether the Government are having a rethink. While there is still confusion about the Government's policy, we do not know how the high-speed link will be paid for or where it will run.

Until those questions are answered, it is an absurdity to press ahead with a Bill which identifies a specific location for the end point of a rail link which itself is indeterminate. It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) to suggest that there is no need to know anything about the high-speed link before we make the decision about locating the station at King's Cross. To locate the station at King's Cross would predetermine an enormous amount about the location of the high-speed link. To attempt to divorce the two, as the hon. Gentleman did and as British Rail has consistently done throughout the passage of the Bill, is disingenuous in the extreme.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I understand that it may be possible to make a decision on the high-speed link in three months. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in that case we should defer the revival of the Bill by voting against the motion tonight? We would then have just the information that the hon. Gentleman, I and others would wish to have, even taking into account the points made by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). That would give us an opportunity to decide on the substance of the Bill with all the facts at our disposal. Would not that be a better way forward?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, which is extremely important for several constituencies in south London. The route that the high-speed link takes from the London boundary towards King's Cross will be extremely important and controversial. If the House deferred the Bill tonight, at least we should know what British Rail was proposing when we considered the Bill further.

The third reason why the Bill should not be carried over is that the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill has been deposited in the House. I was surprised that the hon. Member for Keighley made so little of it. It is an extremely important Bill. It lifts large sections of proposed work out of the King's Cross Railways Bill and proposes them as a separate Bill. It is promoted by London Underground. It provides for the work required by the Fennell report into the tragic fire at King's Cross—in which several of my constituents sadly lost their lives—to be carried out. That work is undoubtedly needed.

Clearly, London Underground has realised the state of play on the King's Cross Railways Bill, read the report of the Select Committee, examined the amendments that the Committee required and taken into account the time that the House of Lords will take to consider it and decided that it is not a game of soldiers that it wants to continue to be involved in. Therefore, it has decided to bring forward the essential Fennell works in a separate Bill ahead of time.

British Rail previously used the argument that it had to go ahead with the King's Cross Railways Bill in order to carry out the Fennell works in the underground station. That argument has now been completely shot away because the works are included in the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill.

I must trespass briefly on your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by noting that clause 19 in the King's Cross Railways Bill, which sought to remove listed building consent powers from English Heritage and the relevant planning authorities, and which the Select Committee roundly condemned and required to be deleted, resurfaces in the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill as clause 20. I am sure that several hon. Members will have more to say on that when the Bill comes before the House. The separately promoted London Underground (King's Cross) Bill contains precisely the same clause and provision that was so strongly condemned by the Select Committee on the King's Cross Railways Bill.

Mr. Beith: I am disturbed by what the hon. Gentleman says. If that outrageous clause reappears, a great deal of time and energy will have been wasted. Can the hon. Gentleman recall whether any undertaking was given by the promoters of this Bill that the clause would not be proceeded with? What value does he place on that undertaking? I shall seek to show later that undertakings given by British Rail are not reliable. I am extremely disturbed to find that the clause reappears in the new Bill.

Mr. Smith: I am tempted to agree with the hon. Gentleman about undertakings given by British Rail. He should remember that the new Bill is promoted by London Underground, not British Rail, but London Underground is a joint promoter of the Bill before us.

The Select Committee required that clause 19 be deleted. It was a strong and clear requirement in the Select Committee's report. Eventually British Rail grudgingly said that it would comply with that requirement, but the provision has cropped up again in relation to the London Underground works.

Mr. Waller: It is clear from the reactions of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and other hon. Members that they imagine that clause 19 is being re-enacted to apply to the works proposed in the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill, which is promoted by London Underground. Clearly, the Select Committee which considers that Bill will want to consider the clause in the context of the Fennell recommendations.

Mr. Smith: I made clear to the House what I specifically referred to. As the provision in clause 19 was the subject of such a strong recommendation by the Select Committee, it seems odd that it should reappear in a further Bill. Paragraph 50 of the Select Committee's report says:

> "The second reason for our rejection of clause 19 is that in our view it would set a deplorable precedent."

That is pretty strong language for a Select Committee and I hope that London Underground will take good note of it and of what has been said tonight by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

If London Underground removes clause 20 from the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill, I for one will have no objection to the Bill proceeding as rapidly as possible on to the statute book. But if it insists on including clause 20—which reflects the previous clause 19 in the King's Cross Railways Bill—in spite of the urgency

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of the Fennell requirements, the Bill should be opposed on the ground that it ignores the enormously important issue of principle which the Select Committee identified.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I hope that London Underground will take heed of that point. It has not only ignored a unanimous view expressed by the Select Committee five months before its new Bill was presented to the House, but included the same clause in other Bills. The same clause appears in the London Underground Bill, which deals with the Jubilee line. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) has observed and criticised that, as I have. London Underground should have got the message that the clause is unacceptable in any Bill. I hope that it will excise it from every Bill in which it appears. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill on the Jubilee line should be accepted only if London Underground removes a similar clause from it?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The strong feelings that many of us have about attempts to undermine the heritage provisions of our planning system by means of private Bills is something that experienced promoters, as both British Railways and London Underground are—it is not as if they are naive and new to the job—should take on board.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: I wish to add my word of support, thus making the opposition to clause 20 all party. If it appears in any form in any Bill, it will be opposed strongly by hon. Members on both sides of the House regardless of party-political allegiance.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know that he has taken a keen interest in that issue and in the Bill that is before us.

The fourth reason why the Bill should not be proceeded with in the new Session is that considerable doubt now exists about the future of the railway lands development at King's Cross. In its report on the proposals for the channel tunnel terminus, the Select Committee drew attention to the important financial links between the proposed office and commercial developments on the railway lands behind King's Cross and St. Pancras stations and the proposal for the new station to go ahead. It identified the proceeds of the sale of the railway lands and the subsequent development as an important element in the financial viability of the station proposals that British Rail was making. The Select Committee set store on the fact that there is a close interlinking between the proposal for the new station and the proposal for office development on the railway lands. The proposal for the office development is still very much in a process of flux, negotiation and doubt. It is subject to planning consideration currently by the planning authority and the London borough of Camden, together with advice and comments from the London borough of Islington. It is subject to a number of local-planning-for-real exercises, in which people are together putting forward proposals that set out what they would like to see built on the railway lands. It will be some time, inevitably, before conclusions on the nature of the railway lands development are reached.

Meanwhile, the property market is uncertain. The economic climate is not good for large-scale developments. The principal partners in the proposed railway lands development are not as financially flush as they were when the proposals were first being made. We must ask whether we can be sure that British Rail will be able to finance the station development that it is proposing, bearing in mind the considerable uncertainty about the commercial and office developments on the railway lands. It is an important consideration. It was referred to by the Select Committee, and the reasons for its doubt and uncertainty about financial viability have been magnified several-fold by the market conditions that have developed since it published its report. In the light of that, we should pause for thought before launching ourselves yet further into the process of the Bill.

The fifth reason that I advance to support my argument that the Bill should not be proceeded with is that inadequate consideration has been given to the road traffic implications of what is being proposed in the Bill. The hon. Member for Keighley made brief reference to the advice of Halcrow Fox, the consultant which has been employed by British Rail. Its laughable advice is that the traffic that would be generated by the proposed station could be contained within the existing road system or network. It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not read in detail the Select Committee's report or the evidence that was provided to the Select Committee. The Committee referred to the Halcrow Fox proposals. It is worth remembering that Halcrow Fox changed its tune during its assessment of the road traffic implications of the Bill.

The Select Committee said that it had listened to what Halcrow Fox had to say as well as to the Department of Transport. The Department said that in its view the Halcrow Fox figures underestimated the impact on road traffic of the proposed station. That is before we start talking about construction traffic and the work that would have to be done to the railway lines. The Department estimates that instead of the 40 to 50 per cent. increase in road traffic that Halcrow Fox was talking about—that would be bad enough—the increase would be nearer to 65 to 75 per cent. That would be the increase in traffic at peak hours.

The hon. Member for Keighley made much of the bus links with King's Cross. Anyone who has tried to travel by bus through the King's Cross interchange at peak hours will know that at present it is appallingly congested. If we are talking about a 75 per cent. increase in traffic—that is the conservative estimate of the Department of Transport—I shudder to think of the traffic congestion and chaos in the immediate gyratory system around King's Cross and in the whole of north and east London. My constituents will be powerfully and deeply affected by the traffic chaos that will be generated by the location of the new station at King's Cross.

It is not good enough for British Rail to say that everyone who arrives from Paris or Brussels will immediately get on an underground train or British Rail train at King's Cross to travel elsewhere in the country. Some people will do that, of course, but an enormous number will take taxis to travel to business meetings. Many others will be met by car by friends or relatives. Others will want to board coaches, buses or specially hired vehicles. There will be an enormous increase in the road traffic in the area.

Unless British Rail wakes up to that fact and starts talking seriously with the Department of Transport about how best the impact of the increase in traffic on those who live and work in the immediate area of King's Cross and

beyond can be alleviated, it does not deserve to have the Bill carried forward. The traffic implications have not been properly considered and researched. They need much further and deeper consideration.

My sixth reason—a linked reason—is that the road traffic impact may be exacerbated by some of the provisions that are set out in the Road Traffic Bill, which was being discussed earlier this evening. That Bill would give the Secretary of State for Transport the power to designate priority routes to assist with the movement of traffic. We have not heard from the Secretary of State or from the Department what they would propose for the potential designation of priority routes in the King's Cross area. Until we know that, it is difficult to judge exactly the transport implications of the proposed station.

The seventh reason for not advancing with the Bill is that the Select Committee required that a series of amendments should be made to it. First, it said that it would propose a right of reversion so that if property was compulsorily purchased but had not been developed within 10 years, that property would revert to the original owner at the original price. We know that that is the Select Committee's intention, but the precise proposal is not in the Bill.

The Select Committee also insisted on the deletion of clause 19 and the inclusion of what became known as plot 51. The House will no doubt recall from earlier debates that plot 51 is the piece of land that is needed to make the platforms longer to take the trains. British Rail had attempted to introduce a Bill that included a provision for platforms that were too short to take the cross-channel trains. The sheer incompetence in British Rail's detailed presentation has been breathtaking—the failure to take account of the length of the platforms is the finest example of that.

British Rail was not only incompetent enough to advance a proposal that was inadequate in the first place, but, to everyone's surprise, it stuck by it for several days of Committee evidence until it was forced to admit that it would be much more sensible to introduce a further proposal to extend the area of works to include plot 51. The Committee is right to insist that that inclusion should be made.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend has made a number of telling points, but I hope that he will leave enough of them for the seven or so hon. Members who also want to speak. My hon. Friend has missed one small point, however, relating to the whole notion of having a second London channel tunnel station. When the original Channel Tunnel Bill was discussed, we were told that there would be one terminus in London. It is clear that past errors are vast, so how can anyone view with any seriousness the opinions and calculations that British Rail is now making?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a strong point and certainly the saga of British Rail and the channel tunnel has been one of error compounded upon error.

Originally, Waterloo was judged the location for channel tunnel traffic. British Rail argued that one terminus would be sufficient and that Waterloo was the bee's knees. At the same time it specifically ruled out King's Cross as a viable option because of the classic congestion that would be caused by the location of such a terminus. That was only four years ago, but now British Rail is saying that King's Cross is the only location that makes sense. It was not singing that tune four years ago.

The Select Committee has required that a subway link to St. Pancras should be enshrined in the Bill, but no such requirement appears. It has also required that the compensation zone should be extended. That does not require an amendment to be made to the Bill, but an undertaking from British Rail. However, one has to take such undertakings with a pinch of salt.

I also understand that the points of access to the proposed station development are to be reconsidered. We do not have any of the amendments before us and therefore we do not know the detail. We know that they are to appear, but we cannot seriously consider this Bill any further until we know precisely what amendments will be made.

I know that other hon. Members want to participate, but there are a couple more reasons why we should not proceed with the Bill. The eighth reason against such further consideration is the environmental impact assessment that is referred to by the Select Committee. It is welcome as far as it goes, but it should be extended. We do not know when British Rail will come forward with any conclusions on that, but the Bill involves the destruction of an incalculably valuable natural park in Camley street. It is valued by hundreds if not thousands of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), especially children. The destruction of that natural park deserves a better environmental assessment to be made. We do not have such an assessment in front of us, so how can we possibly continue to consider the Bill?

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman's argument is tautologous. The environmental impact assessment that the Select Committee required to be updated is currently in hand. It will be made available before the House has an opportunity to debate the issue any further. However, how can the House consider such an assessment and any further updated information unless it has an opportunity to reconsider the Bill? That can happen only if the motion before us is passed.

Mr. Smith: That is the first time we have had anything remotely resembling a guarantee from British Rail that that updated environmental impact assessment will be with us before we consider the Bill further. That appears to be the guarantee from the hon. Gentleman and, as he is the sponsor of the Bill, I grab it gladly and welcome it. As yet, however, all we have is the word of British Rail that that work is under way. We are entitled to be somewhat sceptical of the manner in which British Rail has conducted itself, and may yet conduct itself, in relation to the Bill.

The ninth reason why the Bill should not proceed is that there is still uncertainty about the future of the east-west crossrail. That route is crucial to links in the west. If we press ahead with the development of King's Cross and that crossrail goes ahead, we may find that we have ruled out the possibility of transport links to the west and to Wales that might have been available if an alternative location, such as Stratford, had been chosen. The Government should make clear their position on the east-west crossrail, as it will have a profound impact on the viability of Stratford as against King's Cross. I know that the

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Government have announced that they want to go ahead with that crossrail, but the Treasury has, as yet, made no announcement about the money available to British Rail for that link.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman may know from previous exchanges in the Chamber on that specific issue that I have given a clear commitment that the Government will make the resources available to British Rail and London Underground to complete the east-west crossrail. I have given that commitment on two occasions and I repeat it tonight.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for that assurance and I hope that he is right. However, the figures do not appear in the autumn statement plans for public expenditure. Nevertheless, I hope that the Minister will win his battles with the Treasury and will come up with the required funding.

The Bill has so many flaws and imperfections and there is so much that we still need to know about its consequences that it would be foolish for the House to continue consideration of it now. In its report, the Select Committee, in the strongest language that I have ever known a Select Committee use, said that it was deeply unhappy about the task that it had been given to do in considering the Bill, deeply unhappy about British Rail's conduct, deeply unhappy about the imperfections in Committee procedure and deeply unhappy about the exclusion of Stratford and other alternatives from the consideration that it was able to give the Bill. With such regret and unhappiness being expressed by a Select Committee, the best thing is for us to stop for a moment or two and ask British Rail whether it would be best to go back to the drawing board and start all over again.

I reiterate as strongly as I can why my constituents and I believe that British Rail has made the wrong decision. It should scrap the Bill now and start the process of thinking strategically about how best to maximise properly the benefits of channel tunnel traffic, rather than by means of the tawdry private Bill procedure that we have experienced over the last year and a half. King's Cross will not be able to cope. It is already the most congested part of London, both above and below ground; the Bill would impose millions of extra passengers on that already congested link.

British Rail itself ruled out the King's Cross option four years ago. It has not properly considered the alternatives. Its current examination of the options is either a serious exercise, in the light of which the Bill should be called off, or it is not. It is still conducting a vigorous campaign to promote King's Cross as the desired option while nominally conducting a review of that decision. The Bill would destroy a substantial slice of my constituency and create traffic chaos across much of north London. It would not even bring very much benefit to the north, despite British Rail's claims to the contrary. It is time that the House said, "Enough is enough" and denied the Bill the chance to proceed any further.

8.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): What a pleasure it is to have on the Front Bench, if only briefly, the Chairman of the Select Committee which examined the Bill with such assiduity and acidity. We owe my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and his colleagues an enormous debt. Today I have been reminded that when Brunel was arguing for the Great Western railway, the Select Committee which considered his proposals sat for 57 days, but the quality of those Committee members was nothing like so high as the quality of those who sat under the Chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton.

Since we last considered the Bill, a number of welcome changes have occurred. There is a new chairman of British Rail who seems able to take a wider view of his responsibilities than his predecessor. Whether he will be able to reform the hierarchy that he has inherited to the extent that I firmly believe is necessary remains to be seen, but I have certainly been persuaded that the new chairman of British Rail is determined to ensure that the review of the rail link proposals, station policy, environmental impact and many other factors is more thorough, open and public than anything that his predecessor was able to promise. A great many hon. Members present today should take credit for having helped to ensure that outcome.

I believe that great progress has been made. When I consider the arrogant contempt with which alternative proposals to British Rail's preferred route were treated for the first two and a half or more years of negotiations, the care and courtesy with which we are now being informed of an intention to examine the options seriously come as a welcome change. I have just come from a small meeting including, among other people, the managing director of the channel tunnel rail link project, and it was perfectly clear that British Rail has now agreed that the rail Europe proposal is technically possible. It requires to be evaluated for commercial and financial viability and has to stand comparison with other proposals, but at one stage British Rail was treating that proposal as though it were some sort of back-of-an-envolope joke. It is an enormous improvement that British Rail now accepts it as a technically viable proposition.

We should be grateful to British Rail that it has now established a whole range of studies, albeit late in the day. Nevertheless, the studies should make it possible for those outside as well as inside British Rail to form a judgment as to the right way forward for this massive investment in transport infrastructure. For example, the PIEDA study is to look at the proposed international and domestic stations to see how they act as catalysts for demographic and commercial change. I want to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) whether PIEDA will be looking at the demographic and commercial changes that will be introduced under the King's Cross option. I am assuming that it will, because King's Cross is clearly one of the international stations on the proposed route. If it does consider the likely changes and comes up with a proposition that those changes would be disastrous for the district, what would happen to British Rail's judgment about the King's Cross Railways Bill? If the PIEDA study came to that conclusion, it would reinforce the argument of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who made the case so forcefully, that we should delay presenting the Bill. If the independent consultants recently appointed to assess what the demographic and commercial changes from a station are likely to be were to come up with a report suggesting that

it would be disastrous for that part of London, it would be better to take note of that before the Bill was produced and revived rather than afterwards.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and of the Select Committee that the traffic problem will be dangerous. Paragraph 65 of the Select Committee's report states:

"We believe that a satisfactory solution to the potential problems of increased traffic must be found before the Bill is allowed to proceed to Royal Assent."

In saying that, the Select Committee was saying in as clear terms as possible that to take the Bill forward without having worked out exactly how to cope with the traffic would be totally unacceptable. We are talking not just about railway-generated traffic. When my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir. G. Young) first brought forward the Bill, he gave three principal reasons why it should be accepted. The second was the need to bring back into use derelict land and to produce 30,000 jobs at King's Cross, in a preferred office location. Any right hon. or hon. Member who thinks that 30,000 jobs can be created without severely exacerbating traffic congestion needs his head examined. What about delivery vans, catering lorries, the shops needed to sustain those 30,000 workers, and the couriers who would travel to and from those offices? A whole host of vehicles would be trying to find their way around servicing 30,000 jobs at the back of King's Cross. The mind boggles.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I wish that we had that problem up north.

Mr. Rowe: There is a very severe problem even closer when it comes to jobs. The creation of 30,000 jobs in and around Stratford would be extremely welcome. That alternative should be closely examined, and there is a good case for postponing the Bill for that purpose.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport has listened with exemplary care, and has paid exemplary attention to the details of the scheme. He has shown a far more open mind than his predecessor, who I always suspected fell into the trap of listening to British Rail rather too readily, and then feeling that he had to justify the position that he had adopted. In the earlier debate, we were told by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) that

"we have not yet approved the British Rail investment case for King's Cross, and we look forward to looking at it."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1989; Vol. 152, c. 634.]

I assume that, all these months later, the Government have examined the investment case for King's Cross and have approved it—though I do not recall reading of that development.

Mr. Freeman: I confirm that no investment proposition has been put by British Rail to the Department, and I do not believe that any investment proposition is imminent. When a proposition is put for the King's Cross development as a whole, it will receive the Department's careful consideration, but no approval has been given.

Mr. Rowe: The private Bill procedure, which has always been the bane of our lives, grows more incomprehensible by the moment. We have before us a Bill relating to a railway whose route has not been determined, and whose financial viability has certainly not been realistically assessed, and to a station whose financial viability has not been assessed either. That sums up the whole debate beautifully.

Mr. Freeman: I thought that my hon. Friend wanted to keep an open mind.

Mr. Rowe: An open mind is of tremendous value, but if one is to keep one's mind open to such an extent, perhaps the Bill should also be left to be determined at a later date.

The value of the land to be developed should be taken into account in any investment proposal, although I suspect that it is worth a great deal less now than when the Bill first came before the House. I drew attention on a previous occasion to the Confederation of British Industry's observation that if all the office space that British Rail is seeking to develop at King's Cross were actually built, it would oversubscribe London's office needs by 5 per cent.—and that was in 1989.

We have as the undertaker for the development an operation which is a state-owned industry. The managing director of the channel tunnel rail link, who is a former senior official of the Department of Transport, told me, "It is not really for us to look at the wider issues—it is for us to see what we as British Rail can do to maximise our benefits." We have, growing on the east side of London, a massive office development that is badly under-served by public transport and in some difficulties as a result. We have a publicly-owned undertaking busily engaged in establishing a competitor to that vulnerable east London development, and insisting that it be served by a transport route which to a large extent would destroy the likelihood of any improvement to east London's transport infrastructure.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my hon. Friend agree that the east London situation raises questions which go beyond office development because it is symbolic of the likely move of the centre of London eastwards? That makes an even stronger case for the development of Stratford in strategic terms.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend is right. It is reasonable for British Rail to think that some international passengers will want to travel into King's Cross, and it is equally reasonable for British Rail to make arrangements for the line to be continued from Stratford to King's Cross. British Rail's chairman made it very clear that he saw the line from Stratford to King's Cross as an integral part of British Rail's plans for the next century, and I agree. It would be of great value to domestic and international passengers if such a route were provided. However, if that were its principal purpose, it would be quite unnecessary to develop King's Cross on the scale that is proposed.

The development of a major terminal at Stratford would make sense for every possible reason—not only because it would serve a rapidly-growing freight demand right along the north of Kent but because it would make possible the development of an impoverished part of London rather than drive unwanted development into one of the most congested parts of the capital. I agree with my hon. Friend that London is moving eastwards and that more account should be taken of that, whereas the Bill moves in the opposite direction.

I welcome the growing support in recent months for the Stratford option. The Kent chambers of commerce have come out in favour of it, as has the London and South

[Mr. Rowe]

Eastern Regional Planning Conference, and Kent county council is much more interested in that option than it was before. Many other organisations are developing an interest in Stratford.

I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley can confirm that one of the changes since we last debated the Bill is the substitution of a spur railway for the travelator, which was meant to ensure that people from Manchester and the north-west had a trouble free journey to the international railway. It was exciting to think that one could get off a train at Euston, get on a travelator and whirr along to King's Cross. I hope I am right in my understanding that a spur of the main railway is now proposed rather than a travelator.

Mr. Waller: I understand that there are difficulties in providing a travelator—desirable though such a scheme may be in theory—because of the foundations of the new British Library. Therefore, it is necessary to consider alternative means to provide for passengers travelling between Euston and the new station.

Mr. Rowe: I am rather glad about that, because if people from the north-west had to change to get to the international railway station, it would not be a through journey to the continent, which is what was promised.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Can I assure the hon. Gentleman that people from the north-west believe that what we have been offered by British Rail is, at best, second best, totally unacceptable, and a nonsense proposal?

Mr. Rowe: I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. Dobson: Further to that point, the hon. Gentleman may find it useful to know that the proposal for building the British Library on the site in question was made in 1975. Apparently British Rail discovered only in the past two or three months, that the site lay between Euston and King's Cross–St. Pancras, which is further proof of its total incompetence and incapacity to do anything sensible about the proposal.

Mr. Rowe: Taking a charitable view, one might think that that was one of the improvements resulting from the appointment of a chairman from the hard world of private enterprise where one has to learn such things early if one is planning a project. If the King's Cross Bill, as it stands, were later regarded as having pre-empted the choice of route for the high speed rail link, it would be utterly disgraceful, and I am only marginally encouraged by the belief that British Rail is taking alternative routes seriously.

Finally, I add my voice to those who are warning London Regional Transport that if it tries to get around protection for historic buildings as it has been doing, and in the teeth of the Select Committee report, I shall gladly go into battle against it with as much zest as I have tried to display against British Rail's proposals to date.

8.23 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I do not intend to detain the House long. As the whole of the present King's Cross station lies within my constituency, and the bulk of the work will do severe damage to it, and as the nature park is wholly within my constituency, I feel moved to speak against the revival motion.

Another way to describe the motion would be a carry-on motion, and nothing could more appropriately describe what has been going on. We are back to the farcical film, "Carry on Up the Junction" or, "Carry on Up King's Cross"—unfortunately without the benefit of the immortal Kenneth Williams to add a little class to the whole proceedings.

Once again the House is being treated in a deplorable fashion, as a second-rate legislative slot machine. We have only ourselves to blame if promoters such as British Rail treat us in that way, because we allow ourselves to be so treated.

British Rail and London Underground have reached the stage where they know that they have the money, the time and the influence to put any rubbishy proposals before the House. They put their money in and they get their legislation out. For some years that has been their experience, and that is what is happening now. When they put forward the original Channel Tunnel Bill they sought powers to build the first terminus at Waterloo. At that time —they were stupid, incompetent or liars, or all three—they said that it would be impossible to have a terminal at King's Cross, as it simply would not work. After they got that Bill through, they appeared before the House again and, without mentioning that they had got it wrong before, they said that the perfect solution was to build the terminal at King's Cross. Apparently the traffic does not matter any more, although it was excessive three years earlier and has got worse since. One of the problems is that British Rail and London Underground feel confident that the Government will help to get their legislation through if it relates in any way to the channel tunnel, because that is what experience has shown them.

The Committee appointed by the House to consider the matter met on 51 occasions in public, had five private meetings, inspected the site, took evidence from 60 witnesses and looked at 248 documents put forward by the promoters and others. The Committee was not allowed to consider alternatives to King's Cross. Under the farcical procedure—which the House has accepted until now—for private Bills, every private Bill has to be considered on its merits and on the merits of the proposals put forward. The fact that the proposals are ludicrous and that there would be better ways to deal with the problem is out of order for the Committee. It had to consider a terminal for the channel tunnel rail link before the route had been decided. Nothing could be more farcical than that. We were faced with what might be described as premature legislation. We are being asked to authorise something when we do not have the necessary information upon which to base a sound judgment.

Also, we are faced with what the Committee described as "impropriety". I should explain what British Rail was up to. Allegedly, British Rail is a public servant. It is supposed to be honest, straightforward and decent. However, because the Bill was doing so badly in Committee, because the technical evidence was so full of faults and the people pleading the case before the Committee were so incompetent, British Rail began a secretive, disreputable lobbying process to try to undermine the Committee's work. The Committee said that what was happening

"might have been acceptable in ordinary politics"

but

"was certainly not so in the quasi-judicial context of private bill procedure."

The Committee said that it considered that British Rail's tactics in this regard were

"improper, and verged on being a contempt of the House."

I do not think that we should carry a revival motion to help those who are so incompetent that they have to deal contemptuously with the House.

Mr. Tony Banks: Do not mince your words.

Mr. Dobson: I am mincing my words, because if I said what I really thought about some of these people, I should undoubtedly be ruled out of order.

The Committee also said that it had been placed in the situation that it had wished to avoid—taking a decision while lacking significant information If, after 51 public sittings and the scrutiny of 248 documents, the Committee could not come to an informed decision, certainly the Chamber cannot do so.

The Committee was extremely dubious about allowing the Bill to proceed in the absence of what it described as

"clear assurances to Parliament on various issues"

which—employing a masterly understatement—it said

"currently remain uncertain."

Practically everything in the Bill "currently remains uncertain". We know that there is no route between the channel tunnel and the proposed station: we may be about to see the first underground white elephant in the history of the world. We also know that there is as yet no guarantee of any funds to provide the line between the station and the channel tunnel—if the station is to be placed at one end of the line. Moreover, we have discovered tonight that there are apparently no proposals to fund the project. It seems that the House is expected to endorse a proposition for a project that may not receive any funding.

That brings me back to the cogent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) about the possibility of private funding. Apparently, the idea is to fund the station by building offices, which will provide 30,000 unwanted office jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) pointed out, those jobs would be better placed in the north-east, where they are needed—or in the north-west, or, indeed, almost anywhere except King's Cross. The last thing that my constituency needs is any more office jobs, let alone 30,000: that is roughly 10 times the number of jobs at the Ford works in Dagenham.

I believe that the company that is supposedly to be one of the joint financiers of the project, Rosehaugh Stanhope, incurred a loss of £168 million in the previous financial year. I hope that it will shortly prove the truth of my motto that the only good property developer is a bankrupt property developer, but, if it does indeed become bankrupt, it will certainly not be able to part-finance the station.

Since the House last discussed the matter, there have been one or two other developments that may undermine the financing of the project. It has recently been discovered —again, British Rail in its far-sightedness had not noticed —that St. Bartholomew's hospital and the Church Commissioners have the right of reversion of a substantial part of the property on which it had intended to indulge in property speculation to raise the funds for the station. That has now gone up the pictures, as they say: Barts and the Church Commissioners are entitled to recover the property that they sold more than 100 years ago to the Great Northern Railway Company under threat of compulsory purchase. That is another of the issues that —as the Committee so delicately put it—"currently remain uncertain", and a further reason why we should not approve the motion.

It is particularly galling to hear the Bill's sponsor trying to explain away the fact that clause 19—which would have done away with listed-building protection for Victorian buildings in the area—was struck from the Bill by the Select Committee, quite rightly, only for London Underground, one of the Bill's joint promoters, to have the audacity to present another Bill relating to King's Cross containing the self-same clause to cover works that would be proceeding at the same time as the works proposed in this Bill. The promoters are a collection of incompetent crooks who should be stopped in their tracks —and I do not mean railway tracks.

The promoters—British Rail and London Underground—argued that the clause was necessary because of the sheer scale of the demolition that they proposed. The Committee rightly decided that the sheer scale of the demolition was the very reason why protection should be given to listed buildings. The lunacy of the proposition now being advanced again by London Underground lies in the notion that the only time when historic buildings should not be given protection is the time when they need it because someone is carrying out excavations beneath them.

In being asked to approve the Bill, the House is being treated with contempt. Let me remind hon. Members that, as originally drafted—and defended day in, day out, which led to brain damage among Select Committee members —the Bill provided for a concrete underground box to form the station, which was not big enough to contain the trains for which it had been designed. Surely any organisation that is so purblind, stupid and incompetent as to propose the building of a station with platforms too short for the trains that that organisation is having built is not fit to present a private Bill, pull the lever and ask us to deliver its piece of legislation. We should tell the promoters to go back and start all over again if they are determined to build at King's Cross.

There was a time when the House was more robust in its treatment of private Bills—for instance, on only the second Bill promoted by a railway company. In 1825, George Stephenson—now so distinguished that he appears on the new fiver—presented, along with other promoters, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Bill. His evidence was so bad—so dreadfully incompetent—that it was said that he was shattered, that his credibility as a witness and an engineer had been publicly destroyed and that he knew that he had failed his loyal supporters miserably.

No words could more accurately describe those who appeared before the Committee to promote this Bill. I must commend to the House what our forebears did: they voted the Bill down. They said—even to someone as distinguished as George Stephenson—"This is total incompetence. You cannot justify what you are saying and doing. If you think that you can do the job properly, go away and do it, and then come back and put a proper Bill before the House." That is what Stephenson duly did. If he had been allowed to build the railway that he had

[Mr. Dobson]

originally proposed, there would never have been a successful railway between Manchester and Liverpool: the project would have failed.

In my view, the best thing that we can do is follow the example of our Victorian forebears and sling the Bill out now. There is no need for it; it has been incompetently drafted and incompetently put to the Committee, and it would be a disgrace if we allowed British Rail to get away with this further bit of legislative slot machining. It would be humiliating for the House to accept this proposition. If British Rail built the station that it has proposed in the Bill, it would not be a Euro-terminal of which we could all be proud; it would turn out to be the most notoriously stinking, gloomy pissoir in Europe. We should do our best to stop that coming about.

8.39 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you could advise me about how a matter that I intend to draw to your attention could best be resolved. You know that there are certain places in the Chamber that we cannot recognise as existing, but not a million miles from you sit experts and civil servants who are able to pass notes to Ministers when they are in difficulty, as they are from time to time. At the other end of the Chamber there is a Gallery in which sit advisers —parliamentary agents and others—who provide similar services for hon. Members. The regulations relating to the Galleries, as they apply to the space under the Gallery, say:

"Strangers are not permitted to read books or papers, draw or write, stand in or behind galleries, or carry opera glasses or cameras."

This may be a little bit of theatre, but I do not suppose many people come here carrying opera glasses. As for being unable to write or pass notes, it seems slightly unfair that those of us who do not have the back-up of civil servants are unable to obtain written advice from our advisers. I wonder whether you could advise me on how best that problem could be resolved—somewhere else, perhaps.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a long-established practice. If the hon. Gentleman feels uneasy about it, as he clearly does, may I suggest that he should ask the appropriate Select Committee of the House to look into the matter.

8.40 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I, too, oppose the revival motion. I wholeheartedly subscribe to the reasons enumerated so far for opposing it. They have been more eloquently stated than I could ever hope to state them, but I wish to emphasise one point: the Bill is premature.

I thought that the Bill was premature when it was first introduced in May 1989. I now believe even more that it is premature. It was deviously drafted to make no mention of the route that is to lead to the buffer stop terminal. The very fact that the terminal is to be there predetermines the route to the terminal. Thus, by skilful draftsmanship provision has been made for the development of the terminal. At the same time, those who are immediately affected by the possible route have been denied the opportunity to make representations against it, or even to appear before the Select Committee that considered the Bill. That demonstrates the inadequacy of our private Bill procedure and the way in which that procedure can be misused, to the grave disadvantage of those whom the Bill will profoundly affect.

My constituents, particularly those who live in the Warwick gardens area and who are affected by the threat of the line going through the area, are profoundly concerned about the position of the terminal. For that reason, we should reject the revival motion. We ought not to consider it again until we know the alignment of the preferred route.

British Rail has said that it is looking again at all the options. It is reconsidering the strategic advantage of Stratford as the terminal for the whole of the United Kingdom. It is already a junction for the whole of the United Kingdom. If British Rail proceeds with the King's Cross proposals, that will suggest that it has already decided the result of the reassessment. Therefore, it will not be a truly independent, objective or detached view of the so-called other options.

Mr. Waller: May I reassure my hon. Friend that other recently promoted options, including the Ove Arup scheme, assume that there will be a low-level station King's Cross. The rail link is a completely independent issue. Approval of the motion would in no way adversely affect my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Bowden: I wish that I could accept that assurance and the spirit of good will in which it was made, but I am afraid that I cannot do so. I noted that in his speech my hon. Friend said that all the other proposals, except one, include an interchange at King's Cross. That is not strictly true. All the other proposals recognise that there must be a mid-town link. It would be feasible to have a junction at Stratford, with a left turn going westwards from Stratford and stopping at several places—at Fenchurch Street, perhaps, King's Cross, perhaps, and certainly at Paddington. The proposal that we are considering is crazy. Those who come from continental Europe and who wish to go to Wales and the south-west will have to make their own way across London from King's Cross to Paddington to pick up their connections. What sort of channel tunnel rail link is that? It is no better than what already exists. In fact, it is considerably worse. It will result in increased congestion.

Although many of the alternative proposals recognise that King's Cross may be a mid-town stopping place, it is not regarded as a buffer stop terminal. That leads us very much to the view that we are discussing not so much the construction of a rail terminal as a large office development. This is a developer-dominated enterprise. On previous occasions I have asked—I hope that British Rail will deal with it in due course—that we ought to be told more about this office development project. Is the development value of the land affected in any way by the fact that a channel tunnel terminal will be situated beneath the office development?

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend has chilled me with the awful thought that, if British Rail plans office development, can we be sure that the desks will be wide enough?

Mr. Bowden: I do not know whether British Rail believes that it will be the prime developer, but its development partners may have come to an understanding with British Rail that if value of the land, as ordinary office

development, is £X, the fact that the channel tunnel rail link terminal will be on the spot will lead to the value of the land being three times £X. A great selling point for office development would be to say, "All you have to do is to go down in the lift, get on a train and you will be in Paris or Brussels within two and a half hours." Any developer who wished to let such an office block would find that a supreme selling proposition. We ought to be told whether that is the prime reason for the Bill or whether its purpose is genuinely to find a way in which to link the whole of the United Kingdom and London with continental Europe.

We need to know what the rail alignment is likely to be before we decide whether to give the go-ahead to the King's Cross development, as provided for in the Bill. British Rail does not deserve to have the Bill passed by means of the private Bill procedure. It has deviously misused that procedure to deny those of us with constituency interests the opportunity to make our voice heard in the Committee. For that reason, I shall oppose it.

8.47 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It is a little unfair to blame British Rail for using the private Bill procedure. I presume that the Government did not want to use the Government Bill procedure that they ought to have used. It may have been a hybrid Bill, but that would have been the proper way to introduce such a major Bill to the House. British Rail has used the private Bill procedure for many years. However, the Select Committee pointed out that that is totally unsatisfactory. The Committee was chaired by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). The hon. Gentleman and the other Committee members are to be congratulated on preparing an excellent report. It criticises the way in which British Rail and the promoters have approached the matter.

In some ways, this is a sad day for me. There has been so much criticism of British Rail. I am a defender of public sector industries, but the way in which British Rail has handled the channel tunnel rail link does it no credit. The channel tunnel rail link goes back to earlier times, under a Labour Government. British Rail's lack of knowledge of how much the link would cost finally led to a Labour Government cancelling the channel tunnel development.

I have heard of carry-over motions coming before the House, but we now have a revival motion. As the House is being asked to revive the Bill, the Selection Committee will have to select new Members to sit on it. The hon. Member for Tatton has a new job in the Whips Office, so he may not be available, although I hope that he will be.

Mr. Dixon: No, he will not.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend whispers, "No, he will not." Members who sat on the Committee built up much expertise and knowledge which, if the House agrees to the motion, will be useful.

Labour has made its position clear—we have not supported or voted against the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) made it clear that we would want to be satisfied about several matters, because the Bill clearly was not simply a British Rail King's Cross matter but applied also to the Underground. At the heart of the project was the development land associated with it. It was hoped that with such finance British Rail would finance and develop the whole project. That stemmed directly from the fact that the Government were not prepared to find sufficient finance to assist with the development. It had to be funded in that way—hence the need for the land, which became an important part of the financial deal.

We are being asked to consider whether the concerns expressed on Second Reading have been satisfied by the Committee. I have never seen such universal condemnation of private Bill promoters by a private Bill Committee. Members on both sides of the House mentioned the Committee's criticisms. It said that there was considerable doubt about the justification for the Bill and considerable confusion about the real intentions of the promoters. There were growing uncertainties about the viability of the project and its dependence on the land profits, which have now been thrown into doubt by the court case and the claims of the Church Commissioners on lands which were an essential part of the project. I do not know whether that has been settled, but the first step towards establishing a case for the Church has been taken and accepted.

Probably the most alarming of the Committee's conclusions was that it threw considerable doubt on the promoter's credibility. Credibility has been at the heart of the argument since the beginning of the debate—whether one could believe what the promoters were saying on behalf of British Rail, the credibility of the information provided to the Committee and the credibility of continuing with the evidence given to the Committee, which was clearly shown to be false. To that extent, no greater condemnation could be made of the promoters of this important Bill. The Committee said that the promoters seriously delayed proceedings by persisting with evidence which proved to be false, and that about half the petitioners were unable to present their arguments due to the hostility of British Rail. There was a lack of candidness in providing essential road traffic statistical information, on which the Department was at variance with British Rail. That was known to both parties, but the Committee said that it was informed on the last day and was therefore unable to make a judgment on the essential matter of traffic statistics and whether buses or taxis would provide a better service. That basic information was not available to the Committee.

Paragraph 20 of the Committee's report said:

"We consider that British Rail's tactics in this regard were improper, and verged on being a contempt of the House. This is particularly inexcusable in the light of the fact that British Rail are a very experienced promoter of private Bills. We very much hope that future promoters of private bills will not be tempted to act in a similar manner."

The judgment and recommendation of the Committee in its report was that British Rail's behaviour bordered on contempt of the Committee.

The Committee found—the House has now reached the same judgment—that the system of dealing with private Bills for the development of King's Cross was inadequate and deeply flawed. The House has agreed to a new system to deal with such matters, but it is interesting to note the Committee's conclusion that the procedure was not satisfactory.

The Committee recommends that we proceed with the Bill, despite the lack of substantial bits of information. There is continuing uncertainty about the tunnel link and the funding of the project—two essential requirements of the Bill. I was staggered to hear the Minister say, "We do not have a project on our desks as yet". I know that he is telling the truth as I do not doubt him for a second, but it is staggering that the Government are allowing bodies to

[Mr. Prescott]

come forward with Bills on a major strategic transport decision—probably the most important transport decision this century—while the Department is saying that it still has not received the proposals. That may be true, but is it not time for the Department to get off its backside, find out what is going on, and say, "We may have a view about what is important to the development of the channel link."? People in Europe cannot understand that. They are staggered that the Government can stand aside in that way. In Committee, the promoters argued that money would be available with the EuroRail consortium, but then in June the Secretary of State told the House, "I am sorry, but we do not have sufficient money for the project." It does not stand up.

Finding the finance for the essential link could not be agreed on the conditions that the Government had laid down. I welcome the fact that the Government may now be prepared to find the public money. We said that we would support them in that, if necessary by repealing section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987.

We are hearing conflicting statements from Ministers compared with the ones that we heard a few years ago, but I should like to hear the Minister say that the money will be provided. I believe that the Secretary of State made a similar statement in the newspaper, *Scotland on Sunday*. He gives his major statements to Scottish papers. We shall wait and see what we get in England. He has said that public money will be available. Will the Minister make clear what he means by that? Normally when the Government have said that public money will be made available they meant loans—the privilege of borrowing at a higher rate from the Government, and to be financed by passengers. Does he mean grants when he talks about public money? Will the difference between revenue and cost be made up by direct funding in the way that we understand public funding on such projects? I hope that the Minister will come clean about that and give us more information about the funding of the project.

The Committee faced a difficult decision in recommending to the House that the Bill should continue. The balance of the argument which persuaded the Committee, although there was some dispute about it, was that it would not be fair for the promoters to be faced with tremendous costs while the Committee imposed further delay. Given the recommendations that it received, it had no choice. Nevertheless, it means that the House must now decide whether to pass the revival motion. I understand the comments by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) about operational factors, about the role of King's Cross, about whether the route should go through the south or north of Kent and whether it should be the Thames alternative link international system, the Ove Arup route or British Rail's preferred route.

An essential part will be played by King's Cross, but I do not see a conflict between King's Cross and Stratford, especially as the Government have suggested a surface cross-rail possibility. Such strategic thinking may link those aspects. Only one body can do that—the Government. That is their job. We need strategic thinking on transport issues. The Committee said that northern interests were being led to believe that they would not get the King's Cross development. They therefore had to use pressure groups such as the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress to lobby Members of Parliament. There was to be a north-south battle. That was not necessary. The Committee made it clear that information was being given out. The promoters at the Committee were excused from giving out such information, but the promoters outside the Committee tried to exploit the differences between the north and the south, as though Stratford and King's Cross were alternatives. There is no reason why Stratford and King's Cross should not complement each other. I believe that the Ove Arup connection via north Kent is a far better proposal. It provides eurogauge, eurospeed and a dedicated track and gives British Rail the possibility of developing. A route through the south of London would be crazy, because it is the most expensive and environmentally damaging proposition, although that route may be preferable to British Rail and the promoters.

Will the Minister give us a guarantee about Ashford station? We have already been told that it will not be a new international station, as we were promised that King's Cross would be. It will be readjusted and a line away from the middle of the station will be used. Building costs and commercial requirements mean that costs are likely to exceed an 8 per cent. rate of return. British Rail may say that it wants Ashford station, but the Treasury will not permit that development because it does not meet the 8 per cent. requirement. Development of Ashford station is therefore clearly in doubt.

The Secretary of State told us about the guaranteeing of the route to the north downs, but British Rail seems to want the route to go through south Kent. As Kent county council will find, it will go through the most populous part of Kent, disgorging all its traffic into the Swanley area, next to the M25 and the bridge which is also being built by Trafalgar House. The biggest car park will be in Hythe, and probably around Brands Hatch. Major environmental damage will be caused to the south Kent area.

The south has an interest in the proposal. People from the area believe that the south Kent proposal will be damaging to them. Unless the Government provide public money, Ashford station will not be developed. The north will not get trains travelling directly through the area until three years after development because British Rail is ready to put most of its traffic into King's Cross so that it can feed its InterCity system, ready for privatisation. That is why the north will not get through routes, despite the promises.

Only one purpose-built freight terminal, Port Wakefield, will be ready by the time the tunnel opens. The north is constantly kidded about the facilities that will be available, the south will suffer major damage and London will be torn apart. All parts of the United Kingdom will be disadvantaged.

When the Minister went to Stratford, he said that the Government were looking into all options. If the Minister says that, I believe it, but can he assure us that evidence to the inquiries reviewing the TALIS, Ove Arup and British Rail routes will be made available for others to make an assessment? All too often, when British Rail has carried out assessments and reviews, it has said, "This is our judgment and we will not give you the information on which it is based." We do not trust British Rail's statements, and that is a tragedy. We are not confident about its attitude to this major strategic decision. The Government are responsible.

There have been considerable changes since the report was published. The cross-rail commitment by the Government, which we welcome, marks an important change in the strategic thinking on these matters. I hope that there will be a new dedicated track and a route through the north of Kent, although I shall listen to all the arguments. If the north is to meet the strategic requirements of fast through trains, freight and a connection with King's Cross, there is no reason why one strategic route, as advocated by Ove Arup, would not meet several of those obligations.

I appeal to the Minister not to stand aside in this matter —it is far too critical. The Labour Front Bench has not yet voted on this matter. I shall not vote against the revival motion, although I am far from convinced that British Rail's proposal is worthy of support because of the operational matters associated with King's Cross. If the Bill's promoters do not satisfy us on the route and financing before Report stage, we shall consider whether as an Opposition we should support or reject the Bill. I hope that the promoters and British Rail are listening. Apparently the new Secretary of State now recognises that there is a role for planning and development. I hope that, in that new spirit, the Government will reach a firm decision to provide a good strategic link to Europe, because that is what the Bill is about—it is a public issue, not a private issue, and it requires action by the Government.

9.5 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): On the face of it, this is a procedural motion; as such, it has the Government's support. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) appeared to be lending support to the passage of the motion, which would allow the Bill to continue to be considered. If so, I agree with him. As my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) so ably explained, strictly speaking, the question before us is whether the House should continue to consider the granting of planning permission for the measures in the King's Cross Railways Bill. To that question, the Government's reply is an unreserved yes.

I understand why several of my hon. Friends and some Opposition Members wish to kill the Bill at this stage. They do not agree with the concept of an international passenger terminal at King's Cross, notwithstanding the advantages that will accrue to commuter services to London from the north and from Kent.

Let me remind the House of two matters concerning the proposals for the redevelopment of King's Cross. First, no investment proposal has been put to the Department of Transport and no approval has therefore yet been given. The matter is enormously complicated, but there are precedents for the seeking of planning permission for major railway projects before investment approval is given. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will be aware that his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench have given a warm welcome to a recently deposited Bill which would extend the docklands light railway to Lewisham and Greenwich. No investment approval has been sought in respect of that Bill and such approval is not appropriate because it is a project for private finance. In respect of several light rail schemes, the permission of the House has been sought long before investment approval has been granted. It is by no means a break with precedent for the House to consider the granting of planning permission before investment approval has been given.

Secondly—and perhaps more important—I can assure the House that the Bill does not prejudge the line of route of any high-speed rail link from Folkestone to London. I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East that the Stratford option is not inconsistent with the Bill. A railway line for passengers coming into central London could pass through Stratford—indeed, two of the options on the table envisage such a possibility and one of them at least specifically envisages passengers being carried on to King's Cross. The question of where freight should move north of Stratford is a separate matter, but the Bill does not prejudice British Rail's review of the appropriate route from Folkestone to King's Cross.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked me specifically about Ashford. I repeat the assurance, which I have given in public, that the Government remain committed to an international passenger station at Ashford, and such a project is not inconsistent with any of the three major options that British Rail is considering. All the routes would pass through Ashford; their paths would diverge thereafter.

Mr. Rowe: I think that eventually all three options will make that transition, but a number of us are worried that we should have no clear idea about the financing of the schemes. The House will have spent hours and hours on the Bill and there is a danger that, as a result of all that investment of time and effort, we shall feel bound to accept the financial package, however inadequate or unsatisfactory it may be. We could end up with a project that is inferior to one of the other schemes simply because we have been ground down into accepting it, even if the financial package proves inferior to another in the end.

Mr. Freeman: I must make the obvious point that any high-speed rail link from Folkestone, whether or not it passes through Stratford, would require planning permission and, given the present rules, would require the approval of the House. The Government are still considering representations in response to our consultation paper about reforming the planning procedure for rail and port schemes, but the present rules require any such proposal for a link to come before the House. The House can therefore express a clear opinion about the line in principle or its specific route.

British Rail has promoted the Bill because it is a complicated set of proposals involving commuter services, international services and the underground service. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, the revival motion refers to the Bill's provisions for part of the necessary work for the underground, in particular the expansion of the ticketing hall, and not to works required by the Fennell report, which are urgent. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that he would support the Fennell works if such proposals appeared in a Bill that could be considered more quickly.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister is under a slight misapprehension. The King's Cross Railways Bill originally contained two sets of underground work. One set related to the Fennell requirements for safety and the other related to the provision of interchange facilities below ground specifically in connection with the

[Mr. Chris Smith]

construction of the new international British Rail station. The first set of works has been lifted from the Bill and is being proposed in separate legislation. The other works, which relate specifically to BR's proposals, are still contained in the present Bill.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that perfectly and I apologise if I did not make myself clear. The work connected with the proposed new international station includes improvement to the ticketing hall and facilities. I understand the hon. Gentleman's position.

Mr. Dobson: Before the Minister leaves the matter of financing the project, does he accept the statement in the report from the Select Committee to the effect that the failure of the promoters to convince the House

"that they could afford to complete their proposed works has on several previous occasions been regarded as grounds for finding the Preamble of a Bill not proved"

which led to the Bill being thrown out? Does he also accept the Select Committee's view that the Bill should not be enacted

"in the absence of clear assurances to Parliament on the various issues which currently remain uncertain"?

Further uncertainties have been introduced tonight. When will the House receive the assurances for which the Select Committee called?

Mr. Freeman: I am mindful of the fact that I represent the Government, not the Bill's sponsor. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley will have heard the hon. Gentleman. As other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, I shall deal briefly with some of the issues that have been raised for which the Government have specific responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) referred to the need for British Rail to continue to update traffic forecasts. I assure her that its section 40 plans will be updated by British Rail periodically and that it will certainly take into account improved and changed forecasts for passengers and freight.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to trains north of London and that is clearly relevant to the Bill. We are dealing with seven trains to provide the service north of London. The issue is complicated. Although the contract has not been let, that is not for the want of resources. We are dealing with an international consortium that is designing and building the trains. The companies involved in the United Kingdom have no direct control over their international partners in the consortium and specifically over the Belgians who have been involved in building the body shell for the inter-capital trains. Therefore, the Department of Transport, British Rail and the United Kingdom parties are, to some extent, at their mercy. I hope that the international consortium will soon be able to put an attractive proposition and be able to sign a contract.

Another aspect involves the technical problems of running trains north of London. They have to split and that involves some technology, because passengers must be able to move the entire length of the train under the tunnel—that is a safety requirement. Therefore, they must pass through the portion of the train that will split at appropriate stations north of London. Also, one must make sure that signalling on British Rail is not affected by the new technology on a train. That is by no means certain at the moment. British Rail will seek to make as rapid progress as possible. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) laughs, but we are dealing with a third rail south of London and overhead electric power north of London.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked about the timetable for establishing a new route between Folkestone and London. That matter is directly relevant to the revival motion. I confirm that British Rail hopes by the spring to reach a conclusion on the route from Folkestone into London. W. S. Atkins has been appointed to review the procedure by which a decision is reached. It will then be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to decide on any propositions put to him by British Rail and when to make an announcement to the House. The only firm part of the timetable about which I can tell the House is that for concluding the work on reviewing options.

The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Kingston upon Hull, East asked about the financing of any high-speed rail link—a perfectly appropriate and relevant point in relation to the revival motion. There is no change in the Government's policy on financing. We have said that the Government will not seek to amend section 42, which prevents subsidy to any high-speed line for international passenger traffic. We have not ruled out the financing of the investment by British Rail in the conventional way, similar, for example, to the electrification of the east coast main line when British Rail financed the investment—in this case it would clearly be on a substantial scale—by means of Government loans from the national loans fund, from public service obligation grant, which is paid to British Rail, and from its own internal resources, including the sale of assets.

In the case of such a major project as this, Government loan financing would have to play a significant role. We have not ruled out that option; nor have we ruled out a capital contribution on behalf of Network SouthEast for any improvement in services for commuters in south-east England.

Mr. Prescott: Nothing has changed.

Mr. Freeman: Nothing has changed—that is right. I hope that my clarification has cleared up some hon. Members' confusion about subsidy and financing.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East specifically asked me about through trains from King's Cross. Of course, through trains will be able to run to King's Cross—that is one of the main purposes of the Bill —including, for example, through trains down the east coast main line and the west coast main line.

Mr. Dobson: How many?

Mr. Freeman: That depends on the volume of traffic whenever a high-speed rail link is constructed. Of course, if under the Bill the King's Cross terminal is built in advance of any high-speed rail link which, by then, would obviously be coming, trains would be able to run straight through King's Cross, through the Thameslink tunnel to the Southern region, instead of going around the west of London.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury selectively quoted from the Select Committee's report. However, he did not quote paragraph 38 of that report.

The Committee concluded that it approved the principle of the Bill. By definition, the Select Committee recommended further consideration of the Bill and the Government therefore support the revival motion. I note that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East also supports it.

Mr. Prescott: So that the record is clear, I said that I would not vote against the revival motion, but I still need to be satisfied. That information is not yet before the House, as the Committee made clear.

9.19 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall support the motion, but not because I am impressed by the Minister's argument, not because I am happy and satisfied by British Rail and not because I am in favour of the preposterous procedures that affect the issue. However, if passed, the motion will allow us to maintain the arguments for investment and sensible railway decisions that will serve the interests and concerns of my own area, which are now urgent and serious.

I shall certainly not commend British Rail. It has had a difficult time in recent years because its masters have been foolish, dogmatic and unreasonable. British Rail does not deserve our sympathy. I recall expressing deep regret a few years ago because, although British Rail had used red station seats on all its platforms on the north-eastern line, it had felt it appropriate to use a blue seat at Grantham. When I raised the matter in the House at Question Time and asked why on earth a blue seat had been used at Grantham, the then Minister said that his right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—the then Prime Minister—had told him that she had enjoyed her journey on the train. That was probably the only train journey that she ever made.

Mr. Prescott: The seat is yellow at Huntingdon.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is extremely observant, but that seat will probably change colour—at the same speed as the new methods of signalling to which he referred a moment ago.

However, my concern is related not only to my constituency where economic need is now vital and where we are bemused by the delay and incompetence that have surrounded the matter. I am also concerned to reflect the position in Europe. Until recently I acted as chairman of the Council of Europe Environment Committee, which takes an interest in transport. I have watched with great interest the speed at which French decisions and French investment have proceeded. The other day I flew from Paris to the City of London airport at fairly low altitude. The weather was reasonably good and one could actually see the evidence of the competence and investment in France, where the channel tunnel is already seen as something to be achieved and where it has already been the focus of investment and, years ago, was the subject of decision making——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Hardy: I shall give way to my hon. Friend in a moment. I am sure that he will like my next point.

The state of affairs in Britain will be so appallingly unreasonable that I suspect that the first French passengers to reach the United Kingdom when the trains start running under the tunnel will feel impelled to report the United Kingdom to either the European convention against torture or the Court of Human Rights. Those passengers will take the view that it is unreasonable of Britain to see passengers travelling cheaply and comfortably on French trains, which run on smooth and permanent tracks, while our foreign visitors have to suffer the experiences that the constituents of the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and those of some of his hon. Friends have had to tolerate during the lifetime of this Government. The position is clearly unsatisfactory.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend is an observant Member of the House—even at 15,000 ft when flying across France. However, I must pick him up on one point. He described the airport to which he flew as the "City of London airport". It might only be a name, but it is actually called City airport. Although many people in the London borough of Newham, where City airport is located, bitterly oppose the airport, it gets right up our noses that we are not allowed to call it "Newham international airport". As I said, it is called City airport, not City of London airport. My hon. Friend should get it right.

Mr. Hardy: I apologise to my hon. Friend and to his constituents for my error. My hon. Friend knows that I have some regard for that airport, perhaps because using it means that I am not dependent on London Underground, which costs a fantastic amount of money and is not always terribly pleasant, but can travel to his area on the Riverbus instead, which is the most historic and perhaps the most pleasant form of transport in London. The airport has many advantages, including the fact that aeroplanes fly at a sufficiently low altitude so that one can watch the physical progress being made in France, where there is an entirely different approach. Perhaps because the French Government have not been so dogmatic as the British Government in the past decade, they have ensured that the Pas de Calais, the most impoverished region of France, will receive all the advantages that the improved communication will provide.

It seems years since the House debated the channel tunnel. Some of us made the point then that in France the region where the tunnel terminal is located is the most impoverished while the tunnel reaches the wealthiest region of Britain. We said then—and, as a Yorkshire Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is well aware of the arguments —that if the tunnel was to serve the national interest, early and intelligent decisions would have to be made to ensure that the industrial areas of the north of England were properly served. Yet we have suffered years of appalling and stupid parliamentary procedures, which may have been relevant at the time when a Foreign Secretary was run over by a train early in the 19th century—[HON. MEMBERS: "The President of the Board of Trade."] Yes, it was the President of the Board of Trade. One could think of several Ministers who might benefit from a similar experience.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, following the unfortunate demise of that gentleman, the train was claimed as a deodand, which, of course, is now out of date?

Mr. Hardy: I am sure that the House is greatly obliged to the hon. Lady for that information.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Perhaps the hon. Lady was present.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is being rather ungallant. The hon. Lady may be foolish enough to support the nonsense and incompetence that the Government have demonstrated over the past decade. The whole sorry saga of the tunnel is an illustration of the sad decline of our country caused by the dogma and incompetence of a Government who would rather see service of private interest to the sacrifice of public good than create any opportunity for Britain to secure the national advance that we need.

The ability of the French to provide an adequate, efficient and inexpensive train service should have been obvious to us a long time ago. In case Conservative Members, including perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) who has had much connection with Europe, need an illustration, I recently made two train journeys in France. One was between Paris and Strasbourg and the other was between Paris and Brest. I compared them with my journey from King's Cross to my home in Yorkshire the other night. I arrived at King's Cross station to catch the 11.15 pm train only to find that it was not running. I arrived home at 5 am, having caught one train from King's Cross to Stevenage, one bus from Stevenage to Hitchin, one train from Hitchin to Peterborough and, after an hour on Peterborough platform, another train from Peterborough to Doncaster.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Hardy: The journey was long enough without adding the hon. Lady's observations to it, but I give way to her.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problems that he has just outlined are an excellent reason for denationalising British Rail?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We seem to be moving some way from the revival motion.

Mr. Hardy: I regret giving way to the hon. Lady because I did not want that argument to be made. The French political system is very different from ours, but so are its railways.

On the journeys that I have made in France, the trains have been both on time—as they invariably are—and on permanent way, which is smooth. I have paid fares for more comfortable rolling stock which were little more than two thirds the level of the fares in Britain. Yet after 11 years of this Government we have an unsatisfactory train system, which does not compare with that of our competitors, and areas such as mine, which are in appalling environmental and economic need, cannot look forward to the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will be aware, only the other day we had a televised announcement that a terminal was to be built in Yorkshire. I regret, but my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) does not, that the site of the terminal is on the west Yorkshire rather than the south Yorkshire side, which I should have preferred. However, at least it will be in Yorkshire. My hon. Friend will share my confidence that we shall have the Yorkshire terminal ready, operating and efficient before there is anything to link it to in London or Kent. We should be paying serious attention to those matters.

Mr. Cryer: I am sure that my hon. Friend will acknowledge immediately that British Rail is short of funds because the Government have deliberately starved it of moneys. They have even counted investment that has been generated by British Rail as investment authorised by the Government as if it were some form of largesse. Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that the ordinary work people of British Rail use their best endeavours to provide a decent service in spite of those difficulties and in spite of a sometimes indifferent management and a Government who are completely hostile to the railways?

Mr. Hardy: Yes, I acknowledge that. I would——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will link his remarks to the revival motion that is before the House in responding to the intervention of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend was leading me to the final part of my brief remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the other reason why I shall support the Bill. It has been made clear that the senior management of British Rail has deserved all the criticism that has been offered. At the same time, we need to send a message to those who work for British Rail that we understand and appreciate that they have had to put up with an enormous amount during the past 11 years. They have had to put up with the permanent criticism of a group of people in the Government who wanted them to fail. They have had to put up with grossly inadequate investment and an obligation to work with a level of return on that investment that our neighbours in France and Germany regard as ridiculous.

By supporting the motion, preposterous though it may be, we shall be giving a message to the employees of British Rail that we believe that British Rail is important, that the railway industry is vital and that we deplore the incompetence with which it has been managed at senior level and guided by the Government.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and I share my hon. Friend's view that we need good links between the channel tunnel, the midlands, the north, Scotland and Wales. It was for that reason that we proposed a direction that would have required British Rail to guarantee that with this project there would be a fast, frequent and reliable service to the midlands, the north and Scotland. British Rail had so little faith in that proposition that it refused to accept the direction.

I urge my hon. Friend to consider carefully the prospects of getting a fast, frequent and reliable service to Yorkshire through an underground station that will have only one track in from the south and one track out from the south. The station will purport to serve eight platforms, when the current King's Cross station is limited on Fridays because it cannot get enough trains out and there is not enough space. If we add to the congestion, there is every danger that the service to Yorkshire will be reduced.

Mr. Hardy: I should hate to see the current service to Yorkshire reduced any further. I accept, however, that there is a risk. We need to maintain our argument, and that is why I shall support the Bill.

I have another reason for supporting the Bill. I have enjoyed some of the speeches that I have heard tonight; we have had the opportunity to hear my hon. Friends the Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). We shall hear my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who will be talking from a different viewpoint. We have suffered enormous delay and incompetence. The arguments that have been advanced by my hon. Friends have much merit. I shall support the motion to try to ensure that no one may accuse south Yorkshire Members of not seeking sensible decisions that should have been taken a long time ago.

9.34 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If I had not intended to oppose the revival motion, I have now heard sufficient to cause me to do so.

The Minister kindly sought to address some of the anxieties that have been expressed about the broken promises of British Rail. However, he was unable to do so except by recourse to arguments that produced laughter on the Opposition Benches. The very idea that the technology employed by British Rail is, for example, incapable of coping with splitting a train through the length of which it was possible to walk prior to its being split is laughable. Southern region runs such trains through most of its main line stations every day of the week and has done so for decades. The arguments to which the Minister has had to turn have been supplied to him by British Rail and they do not stand up.

I have an overall anxiety about the Government's longstanding hands-off attitude to the rail link. The idea of having to revive this Bill in the absence of the sort of positive lead provided in France is depressing. The French were determined that their industry and passengers should take full advantage of the tunnel. Therefore, their Government took the lead to ensure that a dedicated link was available. Our Government, however, have come to this debate to give lukewarm support to a revival motion for a Bill which does not provide such a dedicated link facility.

I have sufficient reason on the Government's attitude alone not to support the motion, but one should also take into account the attitude of the promoters, British Rail, whose record is so strewn with broken promises in connection with King's Cross and railway lines out of that station that it is impossible for my hon. Friends and me to support the motion.

We have also been told that the recently announced delay in providing through services from the north to the continent is due not to the failure of the Bill to make rapid progress, but to international arrangements for building trains. It is alleged that the Belgians are holding us to ransom. We are also told that British Rail is unable to provide the necessary technology to split trains that must go to more than one destination in the north of England. Such arguments do not stand up and they belong to a series of broken promises.

During the passage of the Bill, British Rail has obtained the support of a number of hon. Members who represent the north of England. During earlier stages of the Bill, I, too, supported British Rail, in common with other colleagues, because British Rail argued that services would be provided from the beginning to ensure that the north was not put at a competitive disadvantage with the south-east. That is what this is all about. None of us would want the channel tunnel unless it was directly linked with transport routes to the north of England; otherwise the sole effect would be to provide a competitive advantage for industry and commerce in the south-east, which would increase the relative disadvantage of the north.

Mr. Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend's view is shared by those of us who represent the south-east. We are aware that we are over-congested and that the planning bias has led to more people and more development in a part of the country where, to be honest, we need less development. Such linked transport routes are entirely compatible with providing proper regional strategic economic planning, not just general transport planning.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that this is not a north-south battle. There is a shared interest between the northern region and the congested parts of the south-east to ensure that communications are linked directly to the areas that can most readily accommodate industrial and commercial expansion. British Rail has broken its promise on that important point.

The delay on the provision of through services has not been occasioned by the proceedings on the Bill; nor will it be shortened if we pass the motion. A positive decision on the motion would not remove the various technical difficulties that British Rail finds so insuperable when it comes to providing direct trains.

Within living memory we have managed to have direct trains running out of London on ships to and through France to Paris and Brussels. British Rail could not even keep those trains going. Some of us remember travelling on the night ferry train to the continent. The very idea that, with a tunnel at its disposal, British Rail cannot run through trains from the north to the continental centres of Europe seems ludicrous. That is one fundamental broken promise.

The second promise to be broken was made in the same context as the Bill, but was spelt out in detail in the British Railways (No. 2) Bill in a previous Session and also relates to King's Cross. It was the promise that sleeper services and overnight services to Teesside, Tyneside, Northumberland and the Borders would be resumed when electrification had been carried out, if a survey to be conducted by British Rail in conjunction with the local authorities could not demonstrate conclusive reasons for not doing so.

We now find that British Rail does not intend to carry out that undertaking which was given to the House. That casts doubt on the undertakings British Rail has given in relation to the motion. The excuses given by British Rail when it withdrew overnight services to King's Cross were various. I shall leave out some of the more absurd ones and relate two on which BR concentrated.

First, British Rail said that it had a shortage of class 47 locomotives and so could not manage the diesel traction required, but that electrification would solve that problem. Secondly, it said that platforms at King's Cross were too short to accommodate full-length sleeper trains and that

[Mr. Beith]

that problem would be overcome when the King's Cross Railways Bill had been passed and the works associated with it were completed. Now we discover that those two excuses are no longer the reasons why British Rail is not prepared to reintroduce overnight services.

British Rail's latest reason is that it is no longer acceptable to stop sleeper services en route because it wakes up some passengers. In addition, it says that it is no longer acceptable to drop from or add coaches to sleeper trains in the course of the route. We have just been discussing British Rail's own plans to split continental trains, which British Rail is taking a little time to work out, so that argument does not stand up very well. In any case, both those practices are currently in use in order to provide sleeper services to Carlisle, Bournemouth and Poole, to which I suspect the rolling stock was taken when British Rail withdrew the services from the east coast main line. That is another broken British Rail promise that relates directly to King's Cross and the King's Cross Railways Bill.

As a result of those experiences, I have no faith in any assurances given by British Rail relating to the Bill or the motion. For that reason, I shall vote against the motion.

9.43 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am truly delighted to see you, Mr. Speaker, back in the Chair as we move towards the end of the consideration of the procedural motion. I am delighted because there is much discontent——

Mr. Cryer: Stop grovelling and get on with it.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend seems to think that I am grovelling, but I have always thought that a little judicious crawling never does any harm, so I shall persist in my present style.

We are discussing a procedural matter and you, Mr. Speaker, will know—and thus be able to use your good offices to impress on the Government—that it is about time that we got away from the lunacy of the private Bill procedure. I sat as a member of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure—a joint House of Commons and House of Lords Committee. We reported in July 1988 and made about 52 recommendations to avoid Parliament facing problems such as those before us now. We have had the Government's response to our recommendations and I am delighted to say that they have accepted most of them. To get round the problems of private Bill procedure, we need primary legislation initiated by the Government.

In business questions last Thursday, I asked the Leader of the House whether, despite there being nothing in the Queen's Speech relating to the subject, we would have the opportunity to consider legislation from the Government to implement the Joint Committee's recommendations, as we seemed to have plenty of time on our hands. The Leader of the House said that, unfortunately, he did not think there would be an opportunity to do that, and I believe that there will probably be a general election before British Rail gets its act together and makes a decision on the fast rail link. Be that as it may, however, we need to pressure the Government into bringing forward legislation which will avoid the necessity to debate arcane matters of the kind that have come before the House today.

I missed only a few minutes of the debate, at around 7 o'clock when I left the Chamber to give an interview in my role as Mr. Angry of east London for my regular Monday night slot on LBC. I was asked what a revival motion was, as it sounded like something akin to spiritualism. I said that it probably was, in a way, as the House was trying to revive something which in my opinion should have been long dead and buried—the proposal to locate the second London channel rail link station at King's Cross.

Those of us who sat on the relevant Committee and who studied the Select Committee report believe that this is not the way to take that decision. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made the same telling point raised by other hon. Members, though not of his stature and seniority in our party—that this is not the way for a major strategic decision to be taken. As my hon. Friend emphasised, this is probably the single most important transport decision of this century, and perhaps for decades to come. My hon. Friend contrasted the approach taken by the French to our own piecemeal, shoddy, hit-and-miss approach. It is not acceptable for Britain in the 1990s to take such an important decision in that way, using a private Bill procedure which dates back to the 19th century and requires anyone laying any track, be it British Rail or an urban transport system, to seek Parliament's approval. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made it clear that the Government should take a strategic overview. It is absurd for them to walk away from their responsibilities, and for Ministers to sit with their hands under their bottoms saying, "This is not for us to decide —let British Rail get itself out of the mess that it has clearly got itself into."

Among the many hats that I wear in this place—as you, Mr. Speaker, kindly pointed out the other day, in calling me last during Question Time—is that of chair of the London group of Labour Members of Parliament, whose members have a close interest in the Bill. The Secretary of State for Transport before last—they change so rapidly that it is difficult to remember them, but I believe that it was the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon)—came to a meeting of that group of London Members, and when asked who was responsible for the strategic overview in respect of King's Cross, the fast link, and the location of the second station, replied, "Not me —I am not the strategic authority for transport in London and the south-east." So we put the same question to British Rail, who replied, "Not us—we are a transport undertaking; it is our considered belief that people will want to travel into King's Cross, and that we shall make the most money from that location, which is what we are required to do as a transport undertaking, but we are not the strategic transport authority for London".

There seems to be an enormous vacuum. Every sensible right hon. and hon. Member—there are still a couple left on the Government Benches—knows that such a decision should not be subject to the procedural approach that has been adopted, nor should it be left to British Rail and developers to decide the matter. It is outrageous that the Government have walked away from contributing to such a major decision. I hope that those points will be taken on board by the Minister, and that he will speak urgently to his Cabinet colleagues so as to ensure that we do not need to resort to revival motions in the future. The matter has been dragging on for so long and we all know that this is not the way to deal with it.

The Minister said that the Government had not imposed a Whip tonight—we shall test that shortly, but I already detect a certain buzz in the Chamber and I know that it has nothing to do with my speech. Everyone is expecting a Division at 10 o'clock, and will be hurrying back from places of excitement to be here to vote. It is scandalous that the Government are hiding behind British Rail and letting it make a decision on a matter which is important not only to London but to the south-east and to the whole country for decades to come.

Also, it is scandalous that British Rail should be using the private Bill procedure, which has effectively been brought into disrepute by the way the Government have maltreated it. All the private Bills passed recently have been highly controversial, affecting broad areas of the country and a number of political interests. The Government have their payroll vote standing by—Members who have not been here to listen to the arguments, but who come through in droves at 10 o'clock to do the Government's bidding.

I oppose the revival motion on all the grounds that I have mentioned so far, and on others which I am about to mention. The Minister says that British Rail has stated that it is on target to make an announcement by next Easter about a route for the link. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it seems crazy that we are deciding about the location of a station when we have not yet decided the route of the rail line.

Mr. Freeman: If I may correct the hon. Gentleman, I said that British Rail would reach a conclusion about the preferred route by next spring.

Mr. Banks: That does not seem markedly different from what I said. I assume that the announcement will give their conclusions.

Mr. Cryer: Perhaps they are not going to tell us.

Mr. Banks: I am sure that they will—if nothing else has come out of this long, involved and Byzantine procedure, British Rail has reluctantly accepted that it cannot play fast and loose with the House as it has done so far. British Rail is fortunate in having a Government who are sheltering behind it and who will undoubtedly be backing it tonight, but no one in the House will be satisfied with the way in which this has been done, or the way the House has been treated by British Rail.

Mr. Chris Smith: I hope that when British Rail reaches its conclusions on the location of the route for the high-speed link it will give the matter rather more serious consideration at its board meeting than it did when it opted for King's Cross—a decision which was taken by British Rail's board in 40 minutes of discussions.

Mr. Banks: Yes, fast decisions are repented at great length. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said in answer to an intervention, how can the House be expected to treat seriously the calculations that British Rail puts before us? There was to be only one station for London—Waterloo—when the first Channel Tunnel Bill was tabled, but the calculations for potential use of the tunnel were so badly wrong that British Rail has had to go for a second site. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury pointed out, British Rail specifically ruled out King's Cross when it proposed Waterloo. Yet now it has suddenly become British Rail's conch shell, which British Rail intends to stand by as a test of its virility and will not consider any other option seriously. That does not make any sense, and it does not leave us with any confidence in British Rail's calculations.

I visited one of the Minister's predecessors at Christmas last year. He gave me a glass of sherry, which was much appreciated at the time as it was much needed. He now has responsibility for the poll tax. I said to that young Minister, "Sir, you should make sure that British Rail give you good advice." I told him that I had the feeling that, judging by the way it was going about the matter, it would give him a "bummer". I am not sure whether that is a parliamentary expression, but I used it then and I told him, "And you are going to be stuck with it". That is exactly what British Rail has done. I warned the Minister that he should not accept what British Rail was doing at face value. I said, "Minister, you must intervene." He said, "Now is not the time to intervene." That is how the Government have played this all the way through.

I know that discussions have gone on behind the scenes. I do not know exactly what has been said, but I cannot believe that the Government have completely walked away from the matter. I cannot believe that they have no interest in what British Rail does, or that they cannot see what everyone else can see, including Conservative Members—that these are matters of national significance, and that the decisions cannot be left to British Rail and a bunch of developers who view King's Cross less as a station than as a major office development.

Mr. Cryer: Is not one of the unsatisfactory aspects of the way in which decisions have been blundered into the fact that British Rail cannot be trusted with such decisions? It has given the northern cities no guarantees of through journeys and through running, and it seems that investment in King's Cross could well be pursued at the expense of much-needed investment in provincial railway lines serving cities such as Bradford, Leeds and Huddersfield.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Such are the pitfalls that we encounter when decisions are made on a one-off basis. A whole range of London developments is being proposed, but there is no coherence. If the Government can get a bit of money from a developer, they will go along with that developer's proposals.

One of the reasons why Stratford would be a far better location for the tunnel from my point of view—and from the point of view of all the London boroughs, both Tory and Labour—is the number of developments in progress which will involve Stratford, such as the east-west cross-rail and the Jubilee line extension. I do not oppose the latter, as it will bring more transport investment into my part of the east end, which will aid its economic regeneration, but we all know that the Government opted for it not because the Jubilee line was the most important in relation to London's commuter needs but because the developers of Canary Wharf put up some money. That is how decisions are made—not only is there no strategic overview, but there is no interlinking.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that if British Rail had not specifically rejected the resolution proposed by the House in relation to the guaranteeing of through services, the basis for discussions about this development would have been entirely different? The northern

[Mr. Cryer]

provincial areas would have been far more sympathetic and encouraging. Having rejected that condition, British Rail has been breaking similar promises ever since.

Mr. Banks: That is absolutely true. Earlier, my hon. Friend rightly pointed out that the debate was turning into a "get British Rail" session, but we are not criticising British Rail's work force—we are criticising its planning and investment procedures, its board, its senior management and the Government. The ordinary employees must accept decisions made at those levels, while they themselves have no input. It is not a case of getting British Rail because it is inefficient. We are getting at the way in which British Rail has been coralled by the Government into making decisions which are neither suitable for London and the south-east nor appropriate——

Mr. Waller *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 141, Noes 43.

Division No. 24] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barron, Kevin
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Boswell, Tim
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Keith Hampson and
Mr. Humfrey Malins.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Clelland, David
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Bob
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Greville
Lewis, Terry
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Meale, Alan
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L.
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Andrew Rowe.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly.

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Tony Banks *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the arcane procedures of this place is that I must put on a top hat to raise a point of order during a Division. You will know, as we all do, that the normal custom in this place is that there should be no instructions on private Bills and that hon. Members should be allowed to make up their own minds without being pressured by the party managers. It is manifestly obvious by the turnout in the Ayes Lobby that pressure has been put on hon. Members by the Whips. Is it in order for the Government to use the payroll vote to push this measure through?

Mr. Speaker: How hon. Members vote in the Chamber is not a matter for the Chair.

The House having divided: Ayes 146, Noes 21.

Division No. 25] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan

Arbuthnot, James
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Boswell, Tim
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George J.
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clelland, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Eastham, Ken
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
George, Bruce
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meale, Alan
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Keith Hampson and
Mr. Humfrey Malins.

NOES

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beith, A. J.
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Bob
Flynn, Paul
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Lewis, Terry
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Rowe and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the King's Cross Railways Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bill shall be presented to this House not later than the seventh day after this day;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of this House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of this House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the Session 1988-89 which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within Session 1988-89 or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Road Traffic Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Road Safety Bill

Postponed proceedings on Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *resumed.*

10.22 pm

Mr. McCartney: It is some time since I was brought to an emergency stop by Mr. Deputy Speaker to make way for the private business. I want to consider the issues raised by clauses 1 and 3, which I failed to deal with prior to the suspension of this debate. I want to consider random breath testing to see whether those clauses can be improved in Committee.

I make no apology for referring to specific cases that involve the death of a young child and a young adult. I dealt with one case personally and the other came to my notice as a result of a press report. I will refer to those cases not to sensationalise the debate, but to bring a different perspective to the statistics. When deaths occur in accidents, we are dealing with human beings. Young lives are lost and family life is destroyed as a result of the stresses and strains created by that loss of life.

Although I support clauses 1 and 3, I want to refer to certain cases to show why I believe that we shall need to consider strengthening those clauses in Committee. We must take account of what has happened and consider the feelings of families who have been affected by tragic deaths and injuries. We must make it clear to those involved in reckless driving and reckless driving involving drink that there is no hiding place left for them in Britain. Hon. Members must make it absolutely clear to the police, the prosecution services and the judiciary that we expect them to act accordingly when cases involving dangerous and reckless driving and drunken driving come before the courts.

I considered the Bill in the context of three criteria, whether it fitted those criteria and whether I could wholeheartedly support it or support it with reservations. In Committee, the Government should seriously consider making the Bill a non-party political issue and strengthening aspects of it. The three criteria are, first, the extent to which offences are understood by the travelling public; secondly, the enforceability of penalties, in particular in respect of prosecution policy and interpretation by the courts; and, thirdly, the extent to which penalties will act as a deterrent and, therefore, lead to an improvement in the standard of driving.

I start with clause 3 and refer to two young children, Christopher Varma aged seven, and Iain Varma, his brother, aged 14. I pay tribute to their father, Satinda, and their mother, Linda, who have courageously campaigned not only because of what happened to their family and the destruction that was caused by an accident on 21 June 1987, but to try to prevent such a tragedy happening to other children. Tragically, since the accident, their wish has not been carried out. Day in and day out, children are mown down and lives are destroyed in a second by a driver who has taken drink or by a driver who has no consideration for other road or public highway users.

On 21 June 1987 in Blackpool, young Iain and Christopher were doing what many children do in the summer, visiting a local school fete. They became bored with the fete and decided to go to a local sweet shop and then return home to mother. Unfortunately, on their way to the sweet shop they were involved in an accident when they were mown down by the rider of a 1000 cc Kawasaki motor cycle. Young Christopher, aged seven, was killed almost instantaneously, but Iain survived with permanent disabilities. In a few seconds of madness that young life was lost and a family's peace of mind and happiness were destroyed for ever.

What happened thereafter is not only a disaster for the family but is a stain on the judicial system and a public disgrace in respect of the tragic death of one of the young lads, Christopher, and the permanent disability of his brother. As other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall read a short version of a report of the court proceedings, to give an understanding of what has happened and why it has happened not just to the Varma family but to hundreds and perhaps thousands of families who have become the victims of drinking and driving or of people who just did not give a damn about others who use the highways. In the tragic circumstances, I hope that the House will recognise that clauses 1 and 3 are insufficient to meet the task before us.

On 21 June, a 24-year-old baker called Henry Staals on his new motor cycle killed Christopher and seriously injured Iain. He was travelling at a speed that was recognised to be at about 60 mph in a residential part of Blackpool. Indeed, it was said that even the 30 mph limit on that road would have been far too fast in the circumstances.

Mr. Richard Isaacson, who was prosecuting, told the jury that the tragedy happened when Christopher and his 14-year-old brother, Iain, had attended a fete at Highfield school. It was a perfect summer day but the boys, who were not with their parents, were apparently bored and decided to return home to Ashworth court. But when they were crossing Highfield road at about 4 pm a 1000cc black Kawasaki motor cycle, with its headlights blazing, knocked them down. Mr. Isaacson claimed that the bike was driven in such a manner as to make an accident almost inevitable if anyone got in its way. Mr. Isaacson told the jury:

"Tragically for him, as well as for those young boys, they got in his way."

Some witnesses who were overtaken by the motor bike or who saw it from the pavement thought that it was travelling at 60 mph. Mr. Isaacson told the jury:

"If you are sure he was travelling at speeds of up to 60 mph, that is a very reckless course of driving on any basis."

The prosecution alleged that Staals was so determined to enjoy driving his motor cycle that he gave no thought to the manner in which it was driven.

At the end of the trial, Staals was found guilty, but I shall tell hon. Members what happened and the advice of the judge—not in my words, but in those of Christopher's mum, Linda, who wrote to me on 20 February this year, stating:

"20 June 1987: My seven-year-old son Christopher was killed and his fourteen-year-old brother Iain critically injured by a speeding motorcyclist.

October 1988: At Preston Crown Court the motorbike rider was found not guilty of causing death by reckless driving, guilty only of careless driving, fined £250 and banned for two years.

Murder—for that is what it is—on our roads is condoned by society. Innocent victims have no redress even when a Miscarriage of Justice is admitted by the authorities.

I want to change the law to give the innocent victim" the same rights as those appearing before other courts, such as the Court of Appeal.

In those anguished words, that mother was saying that her son's life was worth only £250. However, what made it worse for the family was that when the judge passed the sentence, he then advised the court of the defendant's previous convictions. In 1984 that gentleman was fined £450 and banned for 18 months for riding a motor cycle at a police officer who had tried to stop him for speeding. This was the motor cyclist's fourth serious offence, yet he did not suffer the loss of his liberty, only a miserable fine of £250. There was no redress for the family or the victim.

I could quote many other cases because I have with me a file of similar cases involving children or young teenagers throughout Britain who were mown down by motorists and motor cyclists, some of whom were drunk while others were simply completely out of their heads with concern about themselves, but for no one else. None of the drivers has ever served a prison sentence or had a fine of more than a few hundred quid, and none has ever been banned from driving for life or faced a severe ban of more than three years. Surely that cannot be right when someone drives recklessly or in such a way as to be a danger to someone else, and when that person ends another person's life or damages another person, destroying the rest of her or his life. Surely someone who does that should not walk away with only a paltry fine and with no other consequences and be quickly back on the road either on a motor cycle or in a car.

That is why I believe that in Committee we should seriously consider whether the balance is correct. I am not a solicitor or barrister—I know that the Secretary of State is a distinguished member of the legal profession in Scotland—but, as a lay person, I believe that we need seriously to consider a charge of culpable manslaughter in such cases.

I disagree with the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) who suggested that people who are drunk do not know what they are doing when they drive. That is no longer true. Perhaps 15 or 20 years ago people could make the excuse, albeit the weak one, that they did not understand the impairment to their driving abilities that would be caused by their taking drink. After the years of campaign by Government and non-Government agencies and the change in attitude in society to drinking and driving, anyone who takes a drink must understand the consequences for their driving ability. When, as in the next case to which I shall refer, someone drinks four or five pints of lager before driving, that person is as guilty as anyone of lifting a weapon and deliberately striking a person down.

There is no doubt in my mind that people make a choice to drink and to drink to excess and that their action leads them to maim or kill another person. Therefore, they have a liability. They are culpable. Manslaughter is the only relevant charge in those circumstances. Any lesser charge does not match the consequences of the action taken by the driver. That is even more true of drivers who do not drink but deliberately, as in the case which I shall mention, drive recklessly.

I refer to these cases on a general basis. In this House or anywhere else we should not impose double jeopardy. The gentleman involved appeared before a court and received a fine, however derisory. However, on the general principle, is it right that someone who has a record of serious accidents involving motor bikes or cars, flaunts good road sense and the rules of the highway on a regular basis and as a consequence destroys the lives of young people should not be culpable and should not be charged with homicide or manslaughter? Those are the only charges that such people should face when they come before the courts. Minimal sentences in such cases are not a deterrent.

If we are to seize the opportunity to challenge that small but significant minority who consistently drive motor bikes or cars in such a way as to put people's lives at risk, we should make it clear to them that we shall remove their liberty and that when they come out of prison we shall remove their ability quickly to go back on the roads. It is important that in Committee we seriously consider improving and upgrading what has been suggested in clauses 1 and 3 of the Bill.

I and the vast majority of people who are put in the appalling position of having their families destroyed by the loss of one, two, three or, as has happened in some cases, four members of their family do not seek revenge. Revenge is not my motive. Nor is it the motive of many of the people to whom I have spoken. They genuinely feel that, in their terrible and tragic disaster, the lives of their families should not have been wasted by allowing the carnage on our roads to continue. A change in the law is sought, not for revenge but out of genuine concern for others and the desire that in the years ahead people are not destroyed or disabled by drivers who drink or drive in a reckless and dangerous manner.

The last case to which I shall refer is that of Martin Allsop. His case is not one with which I have dealt personally but it was highlighted earlier this year in the *Daily Mirror* in such a way as to give Martin's mum Pam the chance to say things that she would have liked to say but until then had not been able to. Martin's case not only demonstrates the tragedy of the loss of his life, but says a great deal about our position in the House, the law as it currently stands, alcohol abuse and the way in which the Crown prosecution service and the police can contrive that someone who should be charged with a more serious offence is not and, as a consequence, walks away almost free from killing someone—for surely that it what they have done.

Two years ago Martin Allsop was killed on a pedestrian crossing by Howard Orpwood, a driving instructor. Mr. Orpwood was charged with causing death by reckless driving. He ploughed into three people—Martin and his two friends—at 60 mph after overtaking a car which had stopped to let Martin and his friends cross the road. Witnesses claimed that Orpwood had drunk five pints of lager before getting into his car. At the time of the accident he had more than twice the legal limit of alcohol in his blood. Martin's two friends were badly injured but, fortunately, they survived. Orpwood was acquitted of the imprisonable offence of causing death by reckless driving and found guilty of the lesser charge of careless driving, which does not carry a custodial sentence. He was banned from driving for two years and fined £250.

That is the sort of disgrace which we should not allow to continue. We should amend clause 1 or clause 3 to make it clear to the judiciary and the police what we mean. I have

[Mr. McCartney]

reservations about the elements of part I and enforceability. We must ensure that the Crown prosecution service and the police have clear guidelines and understand how the House feels about offences of the sort to which I have referred. We must ensure also that the courts interpret properly and reflect accurately the view that we take in this place. Let us ensure that sentences act as a deterrent to those who drink and drive.

The two tragic cases to which I have referred are typical of thousands of others. Before the Bill becomes an Act, more young people will be killed as a result of reckless or dangerous driving, with or without drink. How many more children's lives are to be destroyed? How many more will have to live through the loss of their loved ones? I am sorry that I become emotional, but I have met families that have suffered in that way. Let us think of the parents of a seven-year-old child who are told by an ambulance driver that their child has been ripped from them, and who learn about a year later that the person who killed their child is driving a vehicle once again after paying a fine that most people would regard as entirely inappropriate.

The House owes it to the Varma family and all the other families that have suffered so grievously to take every step possible to ensure that those who drink and drive and kill will be charged with manslaughter. We must ensure also that those who drive recklessly or dangerously and cause the death or injury of others are dealt with in the same way. I have no doubt what the CPS should do. The advice that we give to the judiciary should leave it in no doubt how we want it to deal with such offenders. To deal with them in any other way would be a denial of the rights of families. We cannot bring back their loved ones who have gone, but we can ensure that others do not go the same way.

10.43 pm

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): First, I join all those who have welcomed my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to his new responsibilities. I take the opportunity to congratulate the Department of Transport on its recent announcement on adult rear seat-belt wearing.

I wish to put forward the views of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, of which I am joint chairman. The council welcomes the Bill's provisions, especially those on speed cameras and red-light cameras. It welcomes also the new penalties, but is concerned that enforcement should be given a higher priority than appears to have been attached to it. It welcomes the provision to make disqualified drivers who have been found guilty of serious driving offences undergo a driving test before they are able to regain their licence. It is concerned that driving with excess alcohol is exempt from that provision. We believe that there are serious omissions from the Bill.

Who worries about the penalties if the chances of being caught are not great? Rationalisation of police effort in some forces has transformed mobile traffic units into multi-purpose mobile units with the resultant loss of a highly visible police presence on the roadside. PACTS believes that, due to the increase in traffic volume, traffic policing establishment levels should, if possible, be restored to those of the early 1980s—about 11 per cent. of all policing should be concerned with traffic.

We support the greater use of disqualification and the proposals for the retesting, retraining and rehabilitation of offenders. However, we do not understand the logic of omitting drink-driving offences from the retesting proposals. Drink-drivers are, by definition, irresponsible drivers and their omission from retesting removes a useful penalty.

The Government's reliance on retraining is misconceived for, as the road traffic law review pointed out, the effectiveness of retraining has yet to be demonstrated even for those who might be identified as suitable. We believe that the retesting proposals of the White Paper should be extended to cover drink-driving offences as well as bad driving and other offences requiring disqualification.

The new offences and changes in penalty proposed in the Bill are welcome, but they must be seen as part of a package of measures to reduce drinking and driving. Since the introduction of the breathalyser in 1967, the number of excess alcohol offences detected has quadrupled. Surveys have shown that the chances of detection of excess alcohol when driving are extremely low, ranging from one in 250 trips in some areas to one in 4,000 in others. In most parts of the country the perceived chances of detection are similarly low.

A recent survey by the transport and road research laboratory suggested that 42 per cent. of those who admitted to drink-driving believed that their chances of being caught were small. It is true that the figures of those guilty of drink-driving have been steadily improving. Why does the Minister believe that leaving the situation as it is will make any impression on those 42 per cent. who drink and drive and believe that they will not be caught? Clearly, further action is necessary.

The Government have acted, rightly, on adult rear seat belts because that will save lives. They have accepted that persuasion has gone as far as it can in achieving their targets. Given that more lives could be saved with the introduction of random breath testing, why does not the same logic apply? The present law allowing breath testing under two separate sections of the Road Traffic Act 1988 —the result of a court decision—is a mess. It leads to anomalies in enforcement and it gives no clear public message.

Ministers appear to accept the principle of random breath testing every time they quote the fact that it is possible for the police to act under the present law. Why will not they make the principle explicit in practice? In principle, the argument appears to be accepted. Therefore, we are merely debating the most practical methods of enforcement.

PACTS believes that existing breath testing powers should be supplemented by an additional power to allow random breath testing as well as signposted roadside checkpoints, authorised by a senior police officer. That would provide the element of deterrence that is lacking from current procedures, which is necessary to allow the police to secure a significant reduction in road accidents.

Of the 3,400 responses to the Home Office consultation paper on changes to the breath testing legislation, 3,000 favoured additional powers to be given to the police. A recent survey published by the Government's transport and road research laboratory in November suggested that 77 per cent. of those interviewed supported such powers

and 70 per cent. believed that they would work. Given that level of support, the lack of those powers in the Bill is a serious omission.

I believe that the Bill is devalued by its failure to tackle fully drink-driving. It is a good Bill that has missed the opportunity of being excellent. The Department must look again at breath testing and, if nothing else, look again at including alcohol-related offences in the retesting procedure.

10.50 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I apologised earlier for not being here for the opening speeches from the Front Benches. I was in a Committee and came as soon as it finished.

The background to the Bill has been well rehearsed, both today and earlier. Many of us must be under threat of being swamped by an excess of road traffic. Government policy in the Department of Transport is like an oil tanker—it heads in one direction and it takes a lot to change its course to another direction. I am hopeful that, if only slowly, the Department's policy will become less one of supporting road traffic and more one of increasing support for traffic by rail and for public transport generally. If so, we shall begin to do things automatically that the Bill specifically seeks to do.

Other Members have given different figures, but the latest figures I have show that in the decade most recently reported there were more than 62,000 road deaths in this country and fewer than 1,000 deaths on our railways. If the Department's projection of a 142 per cent. increase in road traffic by the year 2025 is correct, unless we do more to reverse that imbalance we risk many more fatalities and injuries. It is therefore not surprising that people become emotional about the subject. None of us would be critical of people such as the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) for the way in which he addressed the ways that people and their families are personally and collectively mutilated by the results of others' irresponsibility.

My colleagues and I welcome part I as far as it goes. Its objective, to summarise it in one sentence, is to prevent and punish drivers who are irresponsible either because they drink and drive or because they are managing vehicles which are mechanically defective and thus a liability to others on or near the road.

When I used to practise as a lawyer, I had experience of both prosecuting and defending people in such cases. Naturally I was vigilant, as I hope we all are, of the civil liberties of all, and careful and wary of the idea that the police should have the right to stop drivers at random in order—as they would say—to test them for an offence. The reality is that we crossed that threshold a long time ago.

Those of us who drive are all at risk of being stopped for a vehicle check, which is automatically assumed to be an acceptable premise on which a policeman can stop a motorist. The police do not have to have a reasonable belief that a motorist has committed an offence to carry out a vehicle check—it is sufficient that they regard it as an important part of their procedures, and it is carried out on a regular basis. If it is done because police believe it is important that vehicles should be safe, sound and mechanically valid, surely the same should apply, or even more so, if there is a chance that a driver has been drinking and is under the influence of alcohol. The rightful argument of civil libertarians is countered by the simple argument that anybody who makes a decision to drive a vehicle must accept the consequences and responsibilities of it and accept that they will be at risk of being stopped by police to ensure that they are driving responsibly.

I welcome the fact that the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), whose speech I listened to with interest, and others have come round to that view. A good thing about the Bill is that its long title is so short and general as to permit amendment of the Bill. From what I have heard of the debate and of the arguments—not just figures—of the British Medical Association and others, there is every opportunity for the Bill to be amended either in Committee or on the Floor of the House and I hope and believe that there will be no resistance if it is seen to be the will of the House that we should take the opportunity to legislate for random breath testing. I hope that that view will not be resisted, because if it is widely held by people after careful consideration, we must respond. I entirely accept the view expressed by the hon. Member for Makerfield and others—that we can in that way act to prevent, particularly in the interests of the young, what has become a horrendous and regular carnage on our roads.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield made the point that the legal technicalities which allow police to stop motorists are not understood by the public at large and therefore not easily capable of being properly executed by the police themselves. It would be far better to say to the relevant agencies—traffic police, police in general, and others with powers in respect of lesser offences—"You have the power to intervene if you believe that a motorist is acting without the law, whatever that suspected breach may be."

It follows that the law must be enforceable, which is the bridge between parts I and II of the Bill. We can pass all the laws that we wish in respect of drink driving or mechanically inadequate vehicles, or to improve parking restrictions, but unless we have people available adequately to enforce those laws, they are as nothing. All right hon. and hon. Members will have experience of parking controls, covered by part II, which are wonderful in theory but no use in practice, because no one enforces them. To cite one example, when I drive to the House I travel down Grange road in Bermondsey, which is capable of carrying two lanes of traffic, but a goods vehicle is regularly parked outside business premises, converting that two-lane road into a single-lane road for about half a mile just before the traffic lights at the start of Tower Bridge road.

Mr. Corbyn: Is it an old taxi?

Mr. Hughes: No, it is not—it is a relatively old van.

Despite regular representations having been made, the restrictions which already exist are not enforced, with the result that that route into central London is regularly blocked. Unless there is adequate enforcement through the provision of the right personnel, part II will be no use either.

I endorse the remark of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield that we are again in a muddle over the differing powers and responsibilities given to those expected to enforce the law. There should be a clear hierarchy in one chain of command—I do not mind whether it is a police or local authority chain of command,

[Mr. Hughes]

though the logic is that it should come under the police because we would not entrust enforcement of serious offences to anyone who is not a police officer. Traffic and other wardens should work under a clear hierarchy so that they can deal with all traffic offences, and so that the public can recognise that they have that authority.

We then need to deal with the two other problems that part II seeks to tackle. I share the view of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) that it is anomalous that half of a United Kingdom Road Traffic Bill should be dedicated to establishing a system for London. It is illogical not to allow decisions concerning regional and metropolitan traffic provision to be taken by the metropolitan authorities in the areas in question. The reason in London is that it does not have a metropolitan traffic authority. The Bill gives powers to the Government in London, and to local authorities elsewhere. The sooner we return to a coherent and democratic regional transport authority for London, the better.

Mr. Corbyn: An elected authority.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, an elected regional authority for London. A small agency within the Department is no substitute—not least because it does not have the local accountability provided by democratically-elected transport authorities elsewhere in this country. That is the fundamental objection to part II. We hope that the situation will be reversed as soon as possible, and that the Government will realise that incoherent transport planning in London has produced a nightmare, and not a dream.

The three ways to deal with urban traffic congestion are to increase public transport and reduce the number of private vehicles, to increase the cost of road use—many eminent hon. Members have argued for that today—and to make roads more user-friendly for cyclists and pedestrians, and less user-friendly for motorists.

I understand that there is a good precedent for charging people more to use roads. In Singapore, where supplementary licensing was introduced for urban areas, there was a 40 per cent. reduction in road traffic. I know that there are objections—one can always argue that the rich can pay and can therefore afford to use roads in the urban areas while the poor cannot. However, in many countries the evidence shows that some form of congested urban area licensing brings in revenue which can be used for other things, and acts as a disincentive to road use. I hope that we shall soon move in that direction.

We should introduce traffic calming measures. There is a whole range of those. The introduction of red routes in London may alleviate problems on the roads involved, but all the side roads off them will be just as blighted by traffic as they were before. Without environmental road improvements with through routes for bicycles only, chicanes, more road humps and differential surfaces—many methods can be used—throughout our urban areas, many residential areas will continue to be blighted. People will use them as rat runs, for short cuts, and for parking. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield cited examples of non-residents constantly parking in residential streets at no cost, blighting the streets for residents and for other people who may need to use them.

The cost of on-street parking has to rise. One can always exempt residential parking, but if people realise that it will be extraordinarily difficult to find a place in which to park and also extremely expensive, it will act as an additional disincentive. That does not work if the public transport system does not provide an adequate alternative. If it does, people will be encouraged to use public transport, and to leave the car at home or outside the urban area—for example, in park-and-ride facilities which seem to have been successfully pioneered in some cities.

We have to be fairly tough about the times and circumstances in which deliveries can be made to retail outlets. The times have to be reasonable so that businesses can carry on, but if a main road is the only point of ingress and egress for vehicles, there could be restrictions. It would be perfectly proper to allow deliveries only outside rush hours and the working day—that is, early in the morning or late in the evening—or to allow deliveries in small vehicles. It is perfectly possible for the Government to take such measures.

One thing that reduces the amount of money taken from motorists by the local authorities in London is that every borough—there are 33 authorities—has a different meter system and different tariffs, so that one never knows, from one borough to the next, what coins will be required, for what period they will work, or the form of meter. Local authority autonomy is indeed a wonderful thing, and I defend it, but, if we are to maximise revenue, co-ordination of traffic meters in London would be no bad thing. Let us try to encourage local authorities to have a standard form of meter. They can have differential pricing—it need not affect the tariff rate that they impose—but for heaven's sake let us make it easier for motorists to have the right coins to put into the meter rather than park and risk putting nothing in, which results in non-payment on a regular basis and if they get caught or chased for payment they still do not pay.

Although the Bill is welcome in some respects, it does not go nearly far enough. I hope that by the time it becomes law random breath testing will have been included and part II will have been improved—as an interim measure, until we have a proper, democratic transport authority for London.

11.4 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): I join other hon. Members on both sides of the House in warmly congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on his introduction of such a comprehensive Bill, which both rationalises and modernises the law on drink-driving and significantly increases the penalties, while also taking steps to deal with those selfish drivers who think that they have the right to block the public highway by parking wherever and whenever they want.

There are, however, some points that I should like my right hon. and learned Friend to consider further. The first involves the creation of a separate national traffic police force to enable regular police officers to be freed from myriad minor traffic duties—I except drink-driving offences—and deployed to perform criminal duties more suited to their training. This is not a new proposal, although it may sound radical. I feel that road traffic policing in general is too important to be left to traffic wardens or local councils. I feel that it would benefit less from an increase in their powers than from the establishment of a small, highly specialist force equipped to deal with the many lesser traffic offences.

Many hours of police time are needlessly taken up with such offences, which—although very important—are not criminal in the accepted sense of the word. The police are burdened by the frustration of having to spend so much of each working day dealing with them. If my proposal were adopted, many aspects of road traffic law with which the police have not the manpower or the resources to deal effectively would be properly enforced. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to consider it seriously: such schemes are operating both in New Zealand—where I was recently able to observe the system at first hand—and in some American states, and they are working extremely well.

My proposed system would also remove a major source of friction between the normal law-abiding citizen and the police. Minor traffic offences often lead to the only occasion on which such people come into contact with the police and I am sure that the police themselves would welcome such a move.

Secondly, I am pleased that the Bill deals in such depth with the problems of traffic management in London and, in particular, that it provides for increased powers to authorise wheel clamping and the removal of vehicles. The statistics tell us that wheel clamping has drastically reduced the rate of illegal parking in the capital. However, as I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will recognise, clamping a car for what amounts in some cases to three or four hours does nothing to relieve that particular section of road from the obstruction, but merely prolongs the problem. It makes far more sense simply to tow away offending vehicles than to leave them obstructing the highway. That can be done by contracting the service out to the private sector.

"Tow-away" should be extended both in the capital and in other areas to help free our roads of badly and illegally parked vehicles. Where tow-away schemes operate in the United States and Canada, they have proved an extremely effective deterrent. Tow-away zones should be extended to all cities and should become the normal way of dealing with the illegal and selfish blocking of public highways. I can vouch for the efficacy of the system: when I was in the United States and Canada I did not dare to park in a tow-away zone, although I might have tried it on in other areas.

The establishment of red routes in London is an excellent if long overdue measure, welcomed by the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association and the British Road Federation. It will probably double road capacity overnight in many areas. But why stop with just some of the capital's major routes? Why stop in London? Surely the principle is right and indivisible: selfish behaviour must not be allowed to clog the nation's arteries and create a horrendous cost, which the CBI has calculated to be about £15 billion a year. Please can the scheme be extended to all arterial roads and other cities? If we are serious about encouraging people to switch from private cars to public transport, inability to park one's car and clog the highway will be the most effective method of persuasion—far more effective than ill-conceived road-pricing schemes which are unfair, impractical and unenforceable.

Like many hon. Members, I share the concern expressed over the evil of drink-driving. Society must make it clear beyond any doubt that if someone decides to drive a vehicle after drinking, the punishment will be so severe that he or she will be unable to do so again. I pay tribute to the tireless work that the Government have undertaken to get their message across. I welcome the proposals in the Bill to tighten the penalties for drivers who are convicted of drink-driving crimes. However, I do not feel that they go far enough. Five years' imprisonment for convicted drink-drivers who cause death may seem harsh, but how much harsher life is for the families who are left without a father, mother, a son or a daughter. Five years' imprisonment becomes 18 months with good behaviour. A death in a family lasts for ever.

Three people in Britain will have died today because of a drinking driver—that is more than will be murdered—and 45 men, women and children will have been seriously injured today, which is more than will be mugged or assaulted. Each fatal accident costs society about £600,000. The total bill for drink-driving in Britain is more than £1 million each day in lost production, demands on the national health service and damage to property.

I am delighted that the figures are falling rapidly, but a more realistic deterrence system would further reduce the figures. That is why I totally support a random breath testing scheme, by which I mean an established system whereby motorists can be stopped at any point on the highway to be breathalysed. Refusal would be an offence. A scheme along these lines has proved to be very successful in Australia and Scandinavia. Road deaths in New South Wales fell by 21 per cent. during the first three years and, more significantly, the number of drivers killed who were over the legal limit fell by 37 per cent.

I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to look at this matter closely during the passage of the Bill. Increased penalties must accompany random breath testing, and imprisonment for at least 10 years for drink-driving offences involving injury or death must be the norm. In Committee we should also consider the deterrent effect of somebody losing his or her licence for a minimum of 10 years.

I can do no better than to quote a short letter from one of my constituents that I received this morning. It is from Debbi Piper, aged 15 years, 10 months. She writes from Corbridge in my constituency and says:

[Mr. Alan Amos]

"Dear Mr. Amos,

I am writing this letter to express my views on drunk driving. During the month of April 1986, my best friend, Sandra Mitchell, was tragically killed by a drunk driver. She was just eleven years of age and was just settling into a new town after a move from Stockport. She was very well loved by all, family and friends. I have since moved from Formby in Merseyside, which was where the incident occurred, to the above address. Sandra's mother featured in last year's Campaign Against Drunk Driving which brought back many fond memories of Sandra.

The purpose of this letter is to convey my ideas to prevent many more deaths like Sandra's. If during the Christmas period, which is, as you know, the time when the most heaviest drinking is done, when drinkers enter Pubs and Clubs and other buildings of the same manner, they hand over their car keys to the bar person who would hang them on hooks like at a hotel and when the person comes to collect his/her keys, the bar person would be the one to decide whether or not the drinker is fit to drive or not. If not then a free taxi service would be available to take them home.

I feel very strongly that everything possible should be done to prevent deaths like Sandra's."

That is a constructive suggestion which we should consider in Committee.

There has been much debate in recent years about the fitting, use and effectiveness of rear seat belts in cars for both children and adults. We have now reached a point where it is compulsory for children under 14 to wear seat belts where fitted in cars, and there is no question but that this saves many lives each year. It seems to me to be only sensible and logical, therefore, that the requirement should be extended to school minibuses. However, I would not wish to put any extra financial burden on bus and coach companies, so the requirement should apply only to new minibuses where seat belts will, I hope, have been fitted and to vehicles that already have seat belts. I do not wish to exaggerate the problem, but in 1988 more than 550 schoolchildren were killed or injured in road accidents involving coaches and minibuses; the vast majority of those children were seated.

My final point concerns the delays that occur before vehicle operators who are in breach of the law lose their operator's licence. Even though irrefutable evidence of wrongdoing and breaches of the law may be held by traffic area offices, illegal operators can continue to trade and may even do so after a court appearance and sentence. That is wrong and is an abuse of the law. I hope that it will be considered and that the loophole that enables operators to continue trading will be closed. I should like the existing powers of traffic commissioners to be extended to enable them to confiscate vehicles of persistent offenders.

Many other details can be discussed in Committee. I believe that there should be a new offence for the so-called courier motor cyclists who weave in and out of static and moving traffic, which is very dangerous and should be stopped. I should like to see a ban on the use of hand-held car telephones, which is also dangerous and should be stopped. I know that the Whips want me to sit down, so I shall do so, but those points should be considered in Committee.

11.15 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This debate is obviously important and the Bill is two separate Bills.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and others, I very much welcome the concentration on road safety in part I of the Bill. I agree that many of the proposals to punish drivers who knowingly drink and then maim people are far too soft. I have no sympathy for such people. They should try to put themselves in the mind of a parent who has lost a child or close relative because some idiot knowingly got drunk and then mowed them down at night in a car. Nothing can bring those people back. The fact that a year or two later they get their licence back and carry on driving is repugnant. I hope that their licences are taken away for a long time and that we consider prison sentences for people who, in effect, commit murder. An analogy is someone who has a licence for a shotgun and uses it dangerously, which results in injury or death, but two years later gets the licence and gun back. That is not acceptable, and something must be done about it. I hope that in Committee the Bill will be strengthened because there is broad consensus that it should be strengthened.

There is an annual campaign and constant publicity against drink-driving and school children well understand the dangers of it, but perhaps we should address ourselves to the drink culture. The opposition to drink-driving is well known and well publicised, and long may it stay so, but there is a culture surrounding alcohol—that somehow it is good and grown up to drink a lot. We must consider the advertising techniques that drink companies use and curtail them. Too many lives are ruined by alcoholism as well as by deaths caused by drunken driving.

The wearing of rear seat belts is obviously sensible and important. I spend a lot of time travelling around London by all forms of transport, and I find particularly irritating the number of people who drive quite fast in heavy traffic with a car phone in one hand and who attempt to force their way through traffic. That is extremely dangerous. I do not care for the argument that whenever the phone rings they should pull over to the side of the road and answer the call. The presence of a phone in a car is distracting for the driver. Even if he does not answer the phone immediately when it rings but pulls over and stops, it is still an irritant and a distraction. Strict regulations must be introduced on car phones.

In Committee, we should consider how good the driving test is. There are no repeat tests; hon. Members who passed their test 20 or 25 years ago have not had to take another test. A case can be made for refresher tests or probationary driving, whereby someone who passes a test has a probationary period of perhaps six months, as in France, during which time he can gain experience of dual-carriageway and motorway driving. It is not sensible that a person can pass a driving test and on the same afternoon head out in a sports car up the M1. There should be a form of probation.

There are speed limits, although they are not enforced on the motorways. Is it right that cars should be advertised for sale as capable of going at 140 or 150 mph? Why are such cars sold when there is no road on which a driver can go over 70 mph legally? The idea that a car can travel at 140 mph may seem attractive and clearly the temptation is to drive at that speed.

The Bill does not provide an opportunity to consider transport and traffic policies. Traffic is predicted to increase by 142 per cent. as we move into the next century. No roads, and certainly no roads in urban areas, can cope with that. We must consider restraining car use, particularly in urban areas, and consider the availability and accessibility of public transport. There is a widely

believed myth that the more people have cars, the more mobile the population is. That is not so. It is true that people become more mobile if they have a car, but the quid pro quo is that villages lose their bus services and urban areas lose their public transport facilities and that for the people who cannot afford to drive, do not own or want a car, life becomes less, rather than more, mobile. We should consider what we are doing.

Only 10 days ago, the Department of Transport announced enormous expenditure to create a fourth, fifth and possibly sixth lane in each direction on the M25. That motorway is already the largest car park in the country. I should have been more interested if the Department had proposed putting parking meters all the way round it—at least some income would have been derived from the traffic jams. It is ludicrous. There should be proper transport planning that encourages people to use public transport and provides public transport that people can use. If there is enough orbital traffic around London to jam up the six lanes of the M25 most of the time—three in each direction—that leads me to believe that there are enough people and enough freight vehicles travelling on the M25 that could use trains. I hope that we shall consider those points rather than calmly predict an ever-increasing number of private cars and the ever-increasing damage that they will do to the environment.

Clause 6, which deals with the fairly new offence of dangerous cycling—it was dealt with in earlier legislation—is extremely subjective and is hostile to the interests of cycling. I hope that the Minister will clarify it. Far from cyclists being implicity dangerous people who go around causing accidents, the vast majority of accidents involving cyclists are caused by motorists driving dangerously or by the lack of proper cycling facilities in urban areas. Too often, cycle lanes start and finish at road junctions but do not go through those junctions or across traffic islands.

I feel strongly about part II, which is really a separate Bill. I represent an inner-London constituency and have been involved in and campaigned on local transport matters for a long time. My constituency suffers from a high degree of traffic penetration—for want of a better word—and the level of car ownership is low. That is common to most of inner London. Impossible amounts of traffic come through our areas every morning and evening. That causes high levels of air pollution and gives rise to great danger to people living there. It needs to be dealt with and it can be dealt with only on the basis of regional or London-wide planning; it cannot be dealt with on a London borough basis.

Ever since the GLC was abolished, there has been no London-wide body. At least the Bill admits that there ought to be such a body, albeit the Secretary of State, who happens to represent a Scottish constituency. I mean no disrespect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that, but is it really on for him to be appointing a London traffic director who will decide the traffic policies for London as a whole?

The Secretary of State reminded us of the history of the red routes proposal. There have been some misconceptions about red routes. The then Secretary of State first announced red routes as an alternative to the motorway-building plans then envisaged for London—the south London assessment study, the west London environmental improvement route, the east London assessment study, the south circular route and all the rest of it. All were the subject of massive opposition in London. In my constituency, 17,000 people wrote letters, signed petitions or sent postcards to the Department expressing their opposition to the road-building proposals. That is an enormous number. As a result, the then Secretary of State finally abandoned the road-building scheme and came up with the idea of red routes instead.

Red routes are, in a sense, priority routes. Their stated aim is to get more traffic through London on existing routes. They are, in effect, major roads by another name. They are designed to increase the use of existing road space and to speed up traffic. In the consultation exercise, they have been dressed up as favouring cyclists and buses. It is true that the proposals contain some improvements in bus routes and cyclists' facilities. But the powers to introduce new bus and cycle routes already exist. We do not need a traffic commissioner for London to bring in more bus routes. I fear that the red routes are a means of forcing major routes through my area and through other parts of London. The Department of Transport has been highly disingenuous during the consultation exercise. First, it announced its intention to introduce red routes and produced a red routes plan. Then it announced that it intended to consult on the proposals. A large number of public meetings were held, some of which were attended by representatives of the Department, some by the consultants, some by the local authorities and some by all three. No public meeting held anywhere along the red route said that it supported the principle. There was overwhelming opposition to the proposals and there were overwhelming demands for better public transport and smaller volumes of traffic going through London. What did we get? Virtually the same principle has now been put forward by the Department.

I can tell the House that, in Committee, we shall table a lot of detailed amendments on the whole question because many of us believe that there is only one way in which to solve London's traffic problems. We must recognise that public transport provides the key. That means larger amounts of public money invested in public transport, more bus priority measures, the better use of existing rail facilities and the development of light rail rapid transit systems throughout London.

Mr. Spearing: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but does he agree that the nub of the case that the promoters of the red routes scheme will have to prove is this: given the legitimate needs of local people in terms of safety and trade, what additional flows can the schemes achieve that cannot be achieved by the use of existing powers, particularly at critical road junctions?

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All the powers that are sought for the improvement of road safety and for bus priority measures and so on already exist. It seems to me that the only purpose of the proposals is to get a traffic director for London who will have powers of veto over what individual borough councils do and who will, in effect, become the appointed traffic authority for London. He or she will have power not only over the red routes but over the routes feeding into them and affected by them and over proposed new red routes throughout London.

I am extremely suspicious about that denial of local democracy. Instead, I want to see the election of a planning authority for London through a system of elected government under which people are representatives and are not told what to do by the Secretary of State's

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representatives. As I explained earlier, far more resources should be devoted to public transport through subsidies, priority measures and a reduction in car travel into and out of central London.

All that can be achieved in several ways. It can be achieved by reducing the number of parking spaces in central London, instead of increasing it. It can also be achieved by physical means. I should prefer a reduction in the number of car-borne commuters travelling into and out of central London. Why should fewer than 15 per cent. of all commuter journeys into and out of central London cause chaos for the other 85 per cent.?

Such a change in approach would make London a nicer place in which to live. It would also make it a more mobile and safe city; and above all it would make it a much cleaner city. We are living in a highly congested, highly polluted, highly dangerous city because there is no serious planning to control the apparently irrepressible growth in the use of the motor car. The Department of Transport sees itself as presiding over the growth in the use of private cars in urban areas. It is not trying to control their use or to encourage investment in rail and public transport.

The Secretary of State kept on saying how much the Government are promoting an investment programme in the railway and public transport systems. That is extremely misleading. In reality, British Rail has been authorised to sell large amounts of its property to finance new rail developments. Exactly the same applies to London Regional Transport. We should be putting new money into our public transport systems and to do that we could end the subsidy on private cars. We could also do it by carrying out an environmental impact assessment of the cost to all of us of the ever-increasing use of cars in urban areas. We should assess how much our lives could be improved by improving public transport.

In many ways the Bill is a missed opportunity. I hope that the issues will be raised again in Committee. Londoners, in so far as they have been consulted on traffic and the red routes, were in favour of public transport, but they came out very strongly against urban road building, against route priority measures and against the imposition of a traffic director for London. Those latter aspects will be opposed strongly throughout the remaining stages of the Bill.

11.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): My constituents, and road users generally, welcome the Bill and particularly clauses 1, 2 and 5 relating to dangerous driving, careless and inconsiderate driving and causing danger to road users.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be aware that my constituents are particularly concerned about the arrival of the M40, which is shortly to be completed close to the border of my constituency. They are concerned about the implications for the quality of life of the huge increase in the volume of traffic and particularly of the increase in the number of heavy goods vehicles thundering through residential areas. The increasing size of lorries is also causing my constituents concern as those vehicles pass by their houses.

I am only too aware of the strength of the transport lobby represented on the Opposition Benches and in particular the strength of the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association. I also acknowledge the interest of some of my colleagues in those matters. However, I want to make one or two points specifically about heavy goods vehicles.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made a serious point, about which many of our constituents are concerned, when he referred to the number of fatalities caused by heavy goods vehicles. As he said, the number is increasing and gives rise to serious concern.

An extremely serious accident, about which I have written to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, occurred in fog on the M42 last month and claimed the lives of several people from Birmingham and elsewhere. The principal cause of those fatalities was heavy goods vehicles. Fatalities on west midlands roads in the past two years have predominantly involved heavy goods vehicles. I should like my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State also to take note of the concern expressed by some of my constituents as well as by myself about the increasing incidence of people being maimed or killed by heavy goods vehicles mowing them down on the emergency lane of a motorway or dual carriageway. I refer especially to an incident earlier this year when an entire family was wiped out by a lorry on the A38 in Staffordshire. The number of such incidents has grown significantly over the past few years.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that not only lorry drivers but the companies involved should be considered. Earlier today, I informed my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State of my concern at an illustration in the *Daily Express* of part of the difficulty that was caused on the M6 at the weekend. The difficulty was largely caused by lorries blocking all four lanes, including the emergency services lane. It is a matter of concern that the behaviour of the drivers of heavy goods vehicles is pressured by contracts placed upon them by their employers. When it can be proved that employers have ignored tachograph readings or placed unreasonable strains or responsibilities on drivers, the law should take action against the employer. However, it should also take action against irresponsible lorry drivers.

I agree with the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) that in the tragic circumstances in which a drunken motorist or motor cyclist maims or kills a child, the penalties currently imposed appear insufficient if not derisory. Nevertheless, in the west midlands and other areas recently there have been occasions when lorry drivers have maimed or killed and have not even been charged. There have been times when they have driven into stationary cars parked at the side of the road in the emergency lane, not on the highway, and have not been charged. The Bill should deal with reckless and dangerous driving of that kind.

I place specific emphasis on the fact that the driver of a 38-tonne lorry is significantly more likely than a car driver to maim, injure or kill not just one but up to a dozen people. Such a driver has extra responsibility. We expect the master of a large vessel, the captain of an aircraft, or the master of a large transport vehicle to take special care, so we should start to look seriously at the role of lorry drivers. I hope that that matter can be investigated in Committee.

There is good reason to ask that life bans on the driving of heavy goods vehicles or coaches should be imposed on

those who have been convicted of careless or reckless driving on more than one occasion. Many lives are at stake. I am seriously concerned by the high speed at which such vehicles travel on the motorways. Hon. Members who live in constituencies distant from London, including one or two of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, will share the experience of driving at the legal limit on the motorway and being overtaken not only by buses and coaches travelling at significantly more than the limit, but also by articulated lorries, some of which belong to well-known haulage companies. There should be greater insistence and greater co-ordination with police forces to ensure that the speed limits relevent to those vehicles are observed.

Mr. McCartney: It is not just a question of some drivers driving dangerously—when they drive loads containing toxic chemicals and other highly dangerous materials, the community living alongside the motorway also becomes affected when the load is spilled or there is a breach in the tank. The speed at which heavy goods vehicles travel is important to road safety, especially when they carry substances which, if they spill out of their containers or cylinders, can affect a wider group than the drivers on the motorway at the time.

Mr. Hargreaves: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point entirely. It speaks for itself and requires no further comment from me. I hope that that matter can be dealt with in Committee.

I have one final, small point to make about random breath testing. Having heard what a number of colleagues have said today, and having discussed the matter with a number of constituents and people in Birmingham generally, in all honesty I must point out that some people are suspicious of random breath testing. Although we all understand the right and proper motive for its introduction, it may well be misunderstood outside, and it may be counter-productive to the police forces. If we consider such a measure, and if my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State admits to its being included in the scope of the Bill for consideration at a later stage, I nevertheless urge colleagues to think carefully and to consult their local police forces before taking too high and moral a view before the public is ready for it.

11.42 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I intend to make only a short speech and to refer only to part I of the Bill. The Secretary of State said that the purpose of the Bill is to save lives. I agree with much of what is in the Bill and many of my hon. Friends have also expressed their agreement. I am one of those—perhaps—incautious people who travel more than 20,000 miles a year on the motorways. I travelled down the M1 and M6 today from Lancashire. Driving down, I saw things that I have seen at normal times but which appeared worse as today is abnormal because some of the results of the recent bad weather are still evident.

I agree with the new definition of "dangerous driving", but should like to draw the Secretary of State's attention to some of the things that should be further considered in Committee. I have no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends who serve on the Committee will table amendments about some of the things that I shall mention.

As I have said, today was one occasion when it was more dangerous than usual to see some of the things on the motorway that give me heart murmurs while I am driving. Today I witnessed tailgating, an offence which should be punished hard. Even if it only intimidates the driver in front, it could cause a small shunt, but, at the worst, the driver in front could panic, run into some obstruction and put on his brakes. He will not have a snowball in hell's chance even of surviving the crash. As a member of the Transport and General Workers Union, I regret to say that some of my colleagues who drive are culpable. However, some employers put pressure on drivers in terms of time, weight, unfit wagons and other matters which have been mentioned today. They are as culpable as the driver behind the wheel. Some of us are surprised that when trade unions break the law they quickly have their funds sequestered, but when employers break the law in ways such as I have suggested, there is a marked reluctance by the courts, the police and the Crown prosecution service to do anything about it.

Mr. Corbyn: Is my hon. Friend aware that the problem of speeding coaches on motorways is a serious one? Is he aware that the timetables for some coach routes between London and other places make it impossible for coaches to make the journey without consistently breaking the speed limit on the entire motorway part of the journey? Should not something be done to companies that force drivers into trying to keep to those timetables?

Mr. Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was coming to coaches, which are one of the main culprits of the motorway offences to which I have briefly referred.

I wholeheartedly support the Secretary of State's contention that new or existing technology should be used to detect offenders. Today we have discussed briefly the use of cameras to detect red light jumping and speeding. I suggest that the Standing Committee should discuss the possibility of using cameras to detect and prosecute tailgaters and those who overtake on the inside. Some drivers do not overtake only once on the inside. Often, particularly on the M1, one can see them overtake on the inside, on the outside again and tear off into the night. One Conservative Member mentioned car telephone users. I saw some today. We came through the worst of the weather in Birmingham where there was snow on the ground in the fast lane—which we parochially call the outside lane—and as soon as we reached a stretch where the weather had bucked up and it was dry and reasonable to drive at 60 or 70 mph, drivers were using mobile telephones. I saw not only one but about four of them with telephones clutched to their ears as soon as they hit a stretch of open road.

The worst thing that I saw today was a small hatchback car with three youngsters between the back seat and the tailgate. That is criminal in anyone's language and that is the sort of thing that I would like to see detected by photographic equipment. I should be the first to argue that it is a reasonable way to bring to prosecution people who put children in such danger.

I am disappointed that the Secretary of State has not grasped the nettle on random breath tests. On January 22 I shall test the mood of the House on random breath testing in a ten-minute Bill. I shall propose the introduction of random breath testing. I am confident that

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it has the overwhelming support of our constituents. I hope to test the mood of the House before the Bill reaches Committee.

On the subject of drinking and driving, I cannot resist referring to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). He said that lemonade cost 35p for a small bottle.

Mr. McCartney: Eighty-five pence.

Mr. Lewis: Even worse. Publicans and brewers—I suppose that the publicans are the victims of the brewers—are even more culpable when it comes to the cost of low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beers. I drink such beers from time to time. In many of the pubs that I use the price is almost double that of ordinary beer. There can be a temptation to the weak-willed motorist, who feels that he is being ripped off, to drink when he should not and then drive his car. Such pricing positively encourages people to consume too much alcohol and then to drive a motor vehicle.

The Bill is defective in some small respects, but I believe that some safety measures could be added to it without much difficulty. For example, I consider that coaches should be banned from the third lanes of our motorways. There is no reason why a 42-seat coach should use a lane that is barred to heavy goods vehicles. There is no reason why 42 passengers should be put at risk in that way. I hope that the Secretary of State will take up that suggestion.

I suggest that there should be some bad-weather containment of HGVs. In the midlands, there was ice and snow on the third lane today and, effectively, it was blocked off. The HGVs were nose to tail on the centre lane. Private motor cars and motor cyclists were being driven or ridden into the spaces between the lorries, which were far too small to enable that to be done safely. The highway code tells us that even when travelling at slow speeds we should allow a space between us and the car in front that is sufficient for another vehicle to enter safely. That was not being done today. In severe weather conditions, we should confine HGVs to the inside lane.

Where there have been debates on EC regulations, for example, I have talked about the spray from HGVs when the roads are wet. It is monstrous that we allow them to fog off sections of the motorway with spray. As some HGVs have well designed and superbly constructed anti-spray equipment, why cannot all HGVs be fitted with it? Why cannot manufacturers be forced to include it in the specification of their products? That should be done. If we have to go beyond the demands of EC legislation, so be it. That is what Parliament is supposed to be about and that is what it should be about. We should insist on proper anti-spray equipment.

I understood that anti-jackknife equipment was fitted as standard on all articulated HGVs. During the weekend, however, I saw at least three such vehicles that had jackknifed on one or other of our motorways. They were almost brand new. If anti-jackknife equipment is available, it should be fitted to all articulated vehicles. I thought that it was, though I may have been mistaken. I plead ignorance.

Mr. McCartney: What about caravans?

Mr. Lewis: I do not want to talk about caravans. I could bore the House all night with what I think about the towing of caravans.

The cause of many serious non-motorway accidents lies with the mismanagement of traffic in urban areas. It is as simple as that. I am afraid that the motor car has taken over the thought processes of many individuals and that problem should be tackled. Some people in my constituency, when confronted by double yellow lines, park their vehicles on the pavement—to blazes with anyone who is blind or otherwise disabled, and children going to and from school. Such people should be subjected to serious collar feeling by the police. They should be banned from driving, as that behaviour is ludicrous. If that is how they behave when their vehicles are stationary, heaven knows what they do when driving. The practice of parking vehicles opposite road junctions should also be subject to rigid policing. That practice is endemic in my constituency and many others.

The Bill, like the curate's egg, is good in parts. I hope that the Secretary of State has listened to this well-ordered debate and will act before the Bill goes into Committee on some of the suggestions made.

11.55 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I warmly welcome the Bill. It is high time that we enshrined into law the North report and I am pleased that a new offence of dangerous driving will replace that of reckless driving. It is also good to put on the statute book the new offence of causing death through careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs. A number of other new offences, including the punishment of vandals who put road users at risk, are also welcome.

I want to concentrate on random breath testing, already referred to by many colleagues, and the greater safety of those on the road as they approach school.

The chilling statistic before the House is that, over the Christmas period, 750 people will die or be injured on our roads as a result of drink. That is a stark statistic that can only be welcome to the undertakers. I do not want to return to the House for another Christmas without acting upon that. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend has moved from the vastness of Scotland to transport and its associated issues and I hope that he takes into account the need for random breath testing. I am surprised that it is not included in the Bill—perhaps that was a drafting error. If my right hon. and learned Friend accepts the mood of the House, that proposal will be included.

In 1988, one in six road deaths in Britain occurred in an accident where drink-driving was involved. In the same year, 840 people were killed and 22,000 injured on the roads and drink-driving was a factor in those accidents. If the average fine is £180 only, it is not surprising that many drivers, particularly youngsters with high disposable incomes, are prepared to take a risk. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) has already referred to the sad cases where people were prepared to take such a risk. The victims of those accidents are unable to bear witness to their survival—they are history.

Random breath testing is used in some countries, including Australia, where the police have the power to set up road blocks and to breathalyse all or a fixed sample of

those passing through. I understand that in New South Wales, fatal road accidents have fallen by 28 per cent. since that procedure was introduced.

When my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic winds up, will he say whether, during the Bill's passage, there can be an experiment in west, north and south Yorkshire and Humberside over the next few months to see whether random breath testing would have a major effect? To his great credit, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire has taken the matter on board, but his lead has not been followed by the other chief constables. The effectiveness of such a measure could be tested while this legislation passes through the House and the other place.

Leaving on one side the important matter of random breath testing, I refer to another great issue, the safety of our young people on the roads as they go to and from school. I praise the recently launched campaign of the *Yorkshire Evening Press* for safer roads. During the Bill's passage we should consider the possibility of having white lines across the road, with the spaces between them diminishing the nearer they come to a school. Secondly, we should have clearer warning notices starting about a quarter of a mile before a school, in addition to the current signs that are sited close to a school entrance, possibly with flashing lights as well. I understand from the county surveyor of North Yorkshire county council that it is not within his present powers to implement such proposals —he would need a statute or the support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State before he could make such moves.

Thirdly, we could have speed humps on the road as a school entrance is approached. That, above all, would stop the speedy driver as he moves towards a school entrance. Only in that way will we substantially reduce the tragic deaths and accidents that take place around schools.

Those are three practical measures that should be considered by my right hon. and learned Friend. I am sure that they would have all-party support. There is no question of delay. If he gives even a hint of the possibility of such experimentation, he will be the parliamentary saviour of this Christmas.

12.3 am

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I have listened to every minute of the debate, particularly all the arguments surrounding random breath testing and, setting aside the obvious strength of feeling that has come through, three clear facts have become apparent. First, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, police already have wide powers. Secondly, the police do not use those powers often and, when they do, they do not use them in a uniform fashion. Thirdly, the public are unaware of those powers.

Whatever the outcome of the Secretary of State's deliberations, I ask him to tell the House tonight, or as soon as possible, that the powers that the police already have will be used. Will he ask the Home Secretary to ask the Association of Chief Police Officers to ensure that procedures are standardised so that there is a uniform pattern nationwide? Will my right hon. and learned Friend seek to use all his powers to ensure that the public understand the powers that the police already have? Those three steps can be taken in time to save lives this Christmas, irrespective of any other legislation that may be passed.

I hope that this will not become the "Random Breath Test Bill", not because that subject is not important or worthy of debate, but because there is so much else that is important. I applaud all the measures contained in part I of the Bill and simply ask my right hon. and learned Friend to consider two further matters of amendment. First, there was a time when the uninsured driver was liable to a custodial sentence which was abolished in the belief that imprisonment was a draconian measure for an uninsured driver. At that time, that decision was probably correct. However, the result of that decision has been to prevent magistrates from using the community service sentence —itself dependent on a custodial sentence—against uninsured drivers. That is a source of considerable concern, and sometimes of hardship, to the victims of the uninsured. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend carefully to consider reintroducing that penalty. Only in extreme cases would imprisonment be used, but it would also open up to magistrates other avenues of punishment.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also consider imposing more severe fines for failing to register vehicles. It is clear that the courts often have difficulty in identifying vehicle ownership, and that in itself causes problems.

Part III does not yet exist, but I hope that it will by the time that the Bill has completed its Committee stage. Part II lays great emphasis on traffic management in London and I should like to see the Bill lay equal emphasis on traffic management outside London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and I will shortly be approaching my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State in connection with improvements to the A253, which serves both Kent international airport and Fort Ramsgate. The A253 and other roads like it are important, because the heart of the county of Kent is being torn out by heavy lorries using as rat runs roads through rural villages that are not suited to them. The villages are being destroyed, and I urge my right hon. and learned Friend carefully to examine the general powers that already apply to London traffic to see whether they could apply to rural villages. It is possible, for example, to introduce sleeping policemen and highway-narrowing schemes to side roads but not to through roads. I ask only of my right hon. and learned Friend that he examines those existing powers, to ascertain whether any of them can be included in the Bill, to help preserve our rural villages from being destroyed.

12.6 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am very glad to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State in his place at this late hour. The general powers in the Bill that he has inherited are very welcome, and it is right that the media have devoted considerable attention to changes to deal with drink-driving, which remains a scourge that demands our attention wherever effective measures can be devised to combat it.

The North report drew attention to the difficulty of proving reckless driving, and it is proper to replace the existing offence by that of dangerous driving and of causing death through careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs. There is widespread public

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belief that those who have caused death through careless driving when unfit to drive have been dealt with too leniently. The law should rightly be concerned with the consequences of people's actions as well as the circumstances leading to the commission of the offence.

The Government have struck the right balance in respect of measures to deter drink-driving. Those who make their priority the introduction of random testing and greater police powers rarely seem to consider that the most effective change—that in public attitudes—has been implemented without any such measures. Drink driving is the biggest single cause of road accidents, but due partly to the Government's approach and to other factors, the number of people driving after drinking has almost halved in the past 10 years, with a commensurate reduction in associated casualties. That it is now regarded as much more socially acceptable for drivers not to take alcohol, and to respond when asked to have another drink, "No thank you, I'm driving," is a dramatic and welcome change by any standard.

Some hon. Members have cited the New South Wales example, where random testing is claimed to have reduced drink-driving by 30 per cent.—but with the voluntary assistance of brewers and others, Britain has achieved a much more radical result. It is futile to imagine that random testing could have the same effect in this country, where—thanks to an alternative, and more successful, approach—we have achieved better results.

In 1978, 42 per cent. of breath tests were positive, but by 1989 the figure had fallen to 18 per cent. That difference is only partly accounted for by the much larger number of tests now made. Random tests are much less productive than the targeted tests carried out at present. Those who continually call for random tests run the risk of signalling to potential drink-drivers that they are unlikely to be stopped and tested when the message should be just the opposite.

Certainly, new technology can deter bad driving, but we should be cautious about legislative changes of the kind proposed. Although I fully support them, it is also worth bearing in mind that, where automatic cameras are used, it will not usually be possible to apprehend the driver responsible for the alleged offence immediately. Under the provisions of the Bill, the company which owns the vehicle may be liable if it does not provide information as to the driver of the vehicle at the time the alleged offence was committed.

There is concern about the use of photography. For instance, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), while welcoming the Government's White Paper, said that

"the further extension, through the use of cameras of the principle that a motorist or a keeper of a motor vehicle can be found guilty of an offence without the same burden of proof that would be required to find him guilty of any other form of offence is becoming a little worrying".—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1989; Vol. 146, column 804.]

In response, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), the then Secretary of State, agreed that there was bound to be controversy and said that the House would wish to debate the matter at length. I believe that that should be the case.

Sending photographs of an individual to that person's employer, or to the keeper of the car, who may be the person's husband or wife, carries more general risks to civil liberty. The fact that an individual can be shown to have been at a particular location at a particular time, perhaps accompanied by persons whose identity he or she would wish to keep private, should not be the concern of an agency of the state. Rightly or wrongly, some people will view such devices as spy cameras. We should be a little cautious before we agree that they can be used on a widespread basis, because their impact may be more broadly felt than we imagine. The objective of reducing casualties by improving the standard of driving, which is a good one, may not always justify the means.

The Government have given signs that they are sympathetic to some of the provisions in the Motor Trade (Consumer Protection) Bill, which I brought forward in the last Session with the support of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration and the Automobile Association. Most accidents are caused by bad driving, but the use of unroadworthy vehicles by bad drivers can be a fatal combination. Indeed, in some cases innocent purchasers of second-hand cars may unwittingly find themselves in possession of a lethal weapon. I hope that the Government will look favourably upon amendments to make the lives of second-hand car cowboys more unpleasant by strengthening the hand of those who seek to protect purchasers.

I greatly welcome the tougher vehicle test recently announced by the Government, which will cover exhaust emissions, thus bringing considerable environmental benefits. I am glad that that represents no threat to classic cars—a matter of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight)—and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State may be able to reassure him on that.

The Bill is an important measure. For the first time in my 11 years in the House, a major Bill has been devoted solely to road traffic. It will provide a valuable opportunity to debate issues which may literally be matters of life and death. I hope that that opportunity will be put to good use.

12.13 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I join in the welcome to the new Secretary of State. I am delighted that he is still in the House at almost quarter past midnight. I hope that the reform of the House, which many hon. Members are pressing for, will soon make it unnecessary for him, or for any of us, to be here at this ungodly hour.

The debate has been wide ranging. Part I of the Bill has received widespread support for its inclusions, and a fair measure of criticism for its omissions. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) explained the extent of the Opposition's support for the Bill and the additions that we shall press for in Committee.

The compelling arguments for measures to improve road safety were well rehearsed in our debates on 16 November and I do not need to reiterate them now. It is the fervent hope of all hon. Members that the new measures will reduce the appalling toll of accidents on our roads.

Today, as on every other day, we can expect about 15 people to have lost their lives and 170 to have been seriously injured. In due course—as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) so graphically pointed out—the families of some of those killed will suffer further grief and anger on finding that the drivers

responsible have received inappropriately light sentences. The creation of offences of careless and dangerous driving, and of attendant penalties, will be widely welcomed, although we shall want to examine very closely the details of the cases raised by my hon. Friend and consider whether it is impossible to strengthen the Bill further in the way that he proposed.

We are, in any event, anxious about the effectiveness of the provisions applying to the new offences if more is not done to alter driver behaviour. As the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) argued in his powerful speech, increased penalties alone are not certain to have a positive effect. He and we have suggested that the introduction of random testing would act as a further deterrent to drink-driving. Whatever the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) may say about the progress made to date—and we all commend everyone involved in that progress—there is room for further improvement; that is why we advocate standardised random testing. Furthermore, we believe that the introduction of such testing could have a wider impact on driver behaviour and would serve as a useful complement to the new offences proposed in the Bill.

We shall continue to urge the Government to introduce random testing, and will of course explore the matter further in Committee. If the new broom—the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind)—is looking for a popular cause, he need look no further: as his hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), who is joint chair of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, reminded him tonight, the report by the transport and road research laboratory found that 77 per cent. of those interviewed supported random breath testing.

As we have heard repeatedly tonight, the Bill consists of two distinct parts, and it falls to me to deal with part II. Like the New Roads and Street Works Bill introduced in the other place, this Bill is a combination of long-overdue and sensible measures—dealing, in this case, with road safety—and some half-baked ideas advanced by Ministers who lack the courage to accept the need for strategic transport planning.

We regard it as mischievous of the Government to tack on to the relatively uncontentious and important part I their extremely controversial plans for London. So anxious are they to be seen doing something in London that they are starting the red routes pilot project on 7 January, before we have had any opportunity to explore the proposals in Committee. Indecent haste has been the hallmark of their proposals.

Just a year ago, the Department of Transport told local authorities that it foresaw

"few benefits and many difficulties"

resulting from the red routes, yet six weeks later the proposal was published in "Traffic in London". Today, the Secretary of State argued that red routes would transform London's appalling traffic problem. The principal rationale is the need to get traffic moving more freely—a worthwhile objective in itself, but one which cannot be advanced without a critical analysis of all the factors that have led to London's acute road congestion and of the likely impact on that congestion of continuing trends in car use. It is here that the Government find themselves with irreconcilable objectives.

In "Traffic in London", the Government say:

"people's aspirations to own and use a car should not be artificially constrained".

However, in June this year a letter from the transportation unit of the Department of the Environment stated that it recognised

"the need to reduce traffic levels where appropriate for environmental and other reasons . . . there is therefore no question of providing for all the potential demand".

The red route proposals encapsulate the Government's muddled thinking. They are designed to speed people through—surely the most potent invitation to the reluctant motorist to abandon the awful tube or the appalling rail service and drive to work instead. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) clearly recognised that danger in his speech. He cautioned me not to make party political mischief out of the issue, but I have to say to him that that is not our choice. Labour's policy on traffic restraint is absolutely clear and to the point. It coincides with the broadest possible political consensus in London.

The red routes will do nothing to reduce the volume of traffic coming into central London. Yet again, the Government offer a piecemeal approach that, while appearing to solve some problems, will exacerbate others, as has been set out very clearly in the debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

London needs a comprehensive strategy, designed of course to reduce congestion but also to provide for commercial transport needs and deliveries, for good quality, affordable public transport and for a cleaner, safer environment. Red routes will not deliver that strategy to London. In this capital city we are already at crisis point, yet the Government continue to predict an increase in private car use while allowing public transport to reach an all-time low.

The new Secretary of State for Transport would do well to remember the ignominious demise of the London assessment studies. They were defeated overwhelmingly by the arguments on this side of the House and by the implacable opposition of the residents in the affected neighbourhoods. Londoners decisively rejected road building in favour of public transport. I draw to the Secretary of State's attention the recent report of the Consumers Association, which found a large measure of public support for traffic restraint and public transport provision.

The Secretary of State emphasised that red routes will benefit buses. Of course we welcome any action that improves bus services. However, he could do so much more were it not for the Government's ideological commitment to deregulation and privatisation. Bus riding in London continues to fall and bus services throughout the capital continue to deteriorate. The stringent enforcement of parking restrictions would undoubtedly help bus flows, which we should welcome. We should also welcome similar restrictions throughout London as a whole.

The pilot plan envisages the creation of additional bus lanes. Again, that is to be welcomed. However, a comprehensive network of bus lanes that are properly and effectively policed is needed for the whole of London. More priority ought to be given to buses at traffic lights. It is not clear to us whether the proposed measures will include that priority, which technically it would be possible to implement.

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

The contradictions in Government thinking are further illustrated by their attitude towards local authorities that are affected by the pilot scheme and towards traffic-calming measures and measures to assist cyclists and pedestrians that they are supposed to encompass. The latter are welcomed by the boroughs and residents alike, yet the Government insist on painting the red lines before any other measures can be put in place. Their rationale for proceeding in this way escapes me. I trust that the Minister for Roads and Traffic will provide an explanation when he winds up the debate.

As the Secretary of State said, parking enforcement is vital in London. He told us that every day some 200,000 parking offences are committed in this city. I am told that 149 of the 150 offenders go free. It has been estimated that increased enforcement could reduce illegal parking by almost a half, with a consequent dramatic effect on congestion.

Parking enforcement is in the hands of three agencies —the police, traffic wardens and local authorities. The result is wholly unsatisfactory. This year, fewer fixed penalty notices have been issued than in 1989. The police have enough to do in fighting serious crime; the traffic warden service is severely understaffed; and local authorities have limited powers of enforcement. The Government are clearly not serious about the problem. There is a need for a new and streamlined system.

The Bill goes some way to tackling the problem. It transfers sole responsibility for permitted parking to the boroughs. In addition, the boroughs will be able to remove and clamp vehicles, which is welcome, but illegal parking will still be enforced by traffic wardens. In any one area, therefore, there will be two enforcement agencies. Not only will there be duplication of effort, but the state of the traffic warden service must raise serious doubts about whether the yellow lines will be effectively policed if the red routes become the priority for traffic wardens. I suggest that it makes more sense to give boroughs all the parking enforcement responsibility for local roads and we shall certainly table amendments in Committee to that effect.

There is also the question of the level of fines that the Secretary of State intends to set for the red routes. Will the Minister give his ideas on that matter?

Finally, we come to the proposed traffic director for London—the one-man quango with draconian powers. Once again, when London is crying out for a strategic authority to oversee London's transport planning, we have yet another body with powers to tinker with bits of the system. His powers of imposition will be considerable, but his duties to consult will be non-existent. We give notice to our intention to table amendments in Committee to make the traffic director more accountable to the people whom he is to serve. Furthermore, we shall oppose the provision for fining local authorities that do not comply with his plans.

We do not intend to press the Bill to a vote, because we can support many of its measures and are anxious to make progress on its road safety measures with due diligence. I give notice, however, on behalf of my hon. Friends who represent London constituencies and my colleagues in the Association of London Authorities, that we regard the red route proposals not only as flawed but as a totally inadequate response to the transport chaos of our capital city. We shall seek to amend the Bill in Committee and, once in government, we shall legislate for the elected strategic authority that London needs. We shall provide the means by which an integrated public transport system can be developed to secure the interests of the people of London, of its economy and of its environment.

12.28 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): It is difficult to remember a more constructive or better humoured debate on the Second Reading of a major Bill. If I detect the mood of the House correctly, it is to delay no further in giving the Bill an unopposed Second Reading.

I thank hon. Members who participated in the debate and showed their overwhelming support for the aim of the Bill—to assist in reducing road casualties and countering congestion, particularly in London. Although there have been disagreements, they have been about the means of attaining the objectives rather than the objectives themselves.

Many hon. Members spoke of the omission from the Bill of any reference to random breath testing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the Father of the House, delivered a forceful speech full of conviction on that point. So forceful was his delivery that those who heard it could never have suspected that this was his first day back after a bout of pneumonia. We are delighted to have him with us.

I remind the House that the police have adequate powers to order roadside breath tests. It is lawful for a police officer in uniform acting in the execution of his duty to require the driver of any vehicle on a road to stop. A police officer who stops a vehicle on a road with the purpose of investigating whether its driver has alcohol in his body is acting in the execution of his duty. It is therefore lawful for a police officer in uniform to stop vehicles at random for that purpose, provided that there is no malpractice such as oppression or capricious conduct on the part of the officer. It is lawful for a police officer in uniform to require a driver who has been stopped in such circumstances to provide a specimen of breath for a breath test, provided that the officer has reasonable cause to suspect that the driver has alcohol in his body.

I believe that the existing powers are sufficient. Indeed, they have permitted a tripling in the number of breath tests over the past decade. Last December alone, there were over 111,000 screening breath tests. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends and others who want to give the police more powers: to what end? Do we really want police officers to spend their time giving breath tests to motorists whom they do not suspect of having alcohol in their bodies? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller)—surely a targeted approach is a better approach. Last December, 91 per cent. of all those who had screening breath tests produced negative results. Surely that bears out the effectiveness of the existing powers as a deterrent.

Mr. McCartney *rose*—

Mr. Chope: I have devoted almost all my concluding remarks to that issue because it was debated at greatest length.

As a former Secretary of State for Transport, it must be a great pleasure for my right hon. Friend the Member for

Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) to see the continuing beneficial impact of his radical period of tenure in the Department, particularly in terms of deregulation of long-distance coaches and the privatisation of the National Freight Corporation. I am sure that he is right in saying that the public is again in a receptive mood for further radical transport policies. I assure the House that, under the leadership of my right hon. and learned Friend the present Secretary of State, people will not be disappointed.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Chope: I shall not give way because I have little time left.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was right to emphasise the way in which enforcement of road traffic law has not kept pace with traffic growth and new technology. Our estimate is that, when clause 19 is fully implemented, some 2 million extra offences will be detected and subject to prosecution on fixed penalty tickets, which will mean that the certainty of detection will be much greater. That is the greatest deterrent. In turn, that will lead to a dramatic improvement in road safety.

Let us remember that the authorities in Paris have introduced the axes rouges, with much more draconian powers than we seek from the House. Already, the immediate effects of the 17 miles where the axes rouges have been introduced in Paris are that journey times are down by 15 to 20 per cent. and the average speed in the central area has increased from 6 to 12 mph. That shows that we are on the right lines in proposing red routes for London.

The Bill contains important measures to reduce road casualties and to counter congestion and traffic pollution. It deserves the support of the whole——

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that there was a 10 o'clock business motion, which means that debate on the Bill can continue until any hour, even though it is opposed, and that the Minister is deliberately seeking not to answer the points raised in the debate concerning the appointment of a traffic commissioner for London?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The second point is a matter for the Minister, not the Chair. On the first point, the hon. Member is correct in saying that there was a 10 o'clock motion and therefore the debate is open-ended.

Mr. Chope: I commend the Bill to the House and look forward to further constructive debate in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ROAD TRAFFIC BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Road Traffic Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for the payment of grants to the Traffic Director for London,

(b) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees), if European Community Document No. 9601/90 relating to non-standard work is recommended by the Select Committee on European Legislation for further consideration, the said document shall not stand referred to any European Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

EDUCATION

That the draft Education Support Grants Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 8th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

12.35 am

Sedgley

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I beg leave to present a petition, signed by nearly 1,000 people in the Sedgley part of my constituency, which deals with the proposal by the neighbouring Manchester city council to incorporate part of Sedgley within its boundaries.

The petition rejects Manchester city council's proposals and my constituents have told me in no uncertain terms that they do not wish to live under a left-wing Labour council whose reputation for high charges and abysmal service is legendary. I support my constituents without reservation and will do everything in my power to resist this extraordinary takeover bid by Labour Manchester.

The petition reads:

"Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to take note of the proposal by Manchester City Council and shall reject that proposal and ensure that those parts of Sedgley in Prestwich that are covered by it shall remain with the Metropolitan Borough of Bury and your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Druridge Bay (Sand Extraction)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

12.36 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The title of the debate suggests that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister and I should pack our buckets and spades for a seaside outing. If buckets and spades were all that there was to it, we would not have a problem. Unfortunately, we are dealing with the removal of sand on a much larger scale.

Druridge bay consists of over six miles of magnificent Northumberland countryside—one continuous beach backed by dunes. Part of the bay is owned by the National Trust and associated with it are four nature reserves, giving protection to rare species of birds and vegetation. There is also a designated site of special scientific interest at Cresswell ponds.

During the summer months and at weekends the area is very popular with people from Tyneside, but it is so large that it can absorb quite a large number of people without losing any of its beauty or any of the sense of remoteness and release that it gives. It cannot so readily absorb or cope with industrial threats, however. One—the plan to build a nuclear power station, against which many of us have been campaigning for over a decade—has receded, along with the rest of the Government's nuclear power programme. I hope that that proposal never reappears; if it does, it will be bitterly contested.

The threat with which we are concerned tonight, however, is that of the erosion of the sand, made worse by industrial sand extraction. Sand has been extracted for many years from the dunes and foreshore—originally it was in very small quantities. Planning permissions were refused for the main areas of activity—Hemscott hill and Blakemoor burn—in 1959 and 1964 respectively. The planning authority took the view that industrial sand extraction on a significant scale should not take place at either of those locations. Then, Ministers of Housing and Local Government—one Conservative and one Labour—gave permission on appeal for both the sites, in 1960 and in 1966 respectively. Since those dates, the areas have been worked—first, by a local builder and since 1982 by Northern Aggregates, a subsidiary of RMC Ltd.

The sand extraction is undertaken by one mechanical shovel, which, since the beginning of 1988, has operated only on the smaller of the two sites—Blakemoor burn—where sand is dug out from the foreshore. On the larger site—Hemscott hill—sand may be dug from the foreshore or from the dunes and the existing permission allows for the complete removal of the dunes along a 1,500 yd stretch of coastline. There are no restrictions on the hours of working or on the number of wagons that can be used to take away the sand. Approximately 40,000 tonnes of sand is taken each year. In 1960, when it all started, only 14,000 tonnes were taken. There is no quantity limit and it is estimated that over 1 million tonnes have been extracted in that way.

It is important to note that the planning permissions were granted on appeal and not by the local authorities in the first place. I do not believe that permission for sand extraction on that scale would have been granted today by the present Minister or any recent Minister. The extraction appears not to have been made subject even to some of the conditions envisaged by the inspectors at the two inquiries. The inspector recommended in 1960 that the appeal should be allowed and he suggested that planning permission should be given for periods of

"three and four years at a time so that sea encroachment and land drainage might be kept under review.

As regards the foreshore, the Minister sees no reason why it should not be worked to a limited extent."

The inspector's report also stated:

"The Minister doubts whether it is practicable to limit annual production for the area to a fixed amount . . . The Minister does not think it necessary to limit any permission to a term of years."

The inspector's report was not even borne out in the Minister's decision which did not impose the kind of restrictions that the inspector seemed to envisage.

In 1965 the inspector referred to allowing the appeal and granting permission

"to the extent and subject to such conditions as are necessary to ensure that the cleaning is on a scale and in a similar manner to that which was carried out before the appellant commenced work on the site."

However, the conditions set that year do not bear that out. They are not sufficient to limit the extraction of sand to the level that was going on before 1960 or 1965.

I do not believe that permission for extraction would have been granted today. Even if it were, it would be subject to the kind of conditions that the inspectors envisaged back in the 1960s, but which were not applied. One of the conditions was that one small mechanical shovel should be used. Of course, that term now extends to quite a modern piece of equipment that has three times the capacity of the machine used in 1960.

We should also bear it in mind that since then the Cresswell pond site has been declared a site of special scientific interest. However, because of the planning permission, it could not be extended so that its limitations covered the whole area, as that would have made the declaration retrospective and outwith the terms of the SSSI legislation.

So far as I know, nothing like this is tolerated elsewhere on anything like this scale. The county council has inquired around the country and has found that in almost all comparable cases permissions were more restricted and in many cases had been brought to an end. The planning permissions to which I have referred effectively last until 2042. They have more than 50 years to go. People in the area are deeply concerned about what is happening and about seeing their beach removed in that way.

Much of the concern stems from the fear of significant erosion. Research undertaken in 1970 by Professor Clayton of the University of East Anglia and research undertaken in 1985 and 1986 by Babtie, Shaw and Morton for Castle Morpeth borough council showed that the effects of sand removal coupled with coal mining subsidence affecting some parts of the bay could lead to a danger of inundation by the sea. The Babtie, Shaw and Morton report stated:

"Sea encroachment would flood and contaminate large areas of agricultural and amentity land, together with the C110 Cresswell to Druridge road."

That road is flooded today. The area that has been cut away was flooded—the sea broke into it during the stormy weather of the past weekend.

The former warden for the Northumberland wildlife trust of the area around Druridge bay said that, at the present rate, within 20 years we will not have any sand dunes, and that if one takes sand from one point, the sand

moves to make the same shape, and the result is erosion all along the bay. That point by Mr. Scott explains how it is that, although the sand keeps replacing itself at the point from which it is being extracted, the process attracts sand to fill the gap from other parts of the bay where the beach is being eroded. All those who have carried out any research or study of the matter are convinced that serious erosion of the beach will continue and that damage to the dunes is threatened. Sand extraction affects the whole bay and there are signs of rapid erosion at the north end.

Work on the dunes could be resumed within the planning permission at any time. It is not going on at the moment, but further extraction from the dunes—effectively levelling the dunes—could be resumed at any time and disastrous consequences could follow.

We all know that changing meteorological patterns and global warming are expected to result in an increase in tide levels in the North sea, which would further threaten the dunes. That is now accepted wisdom—the former Prime Minister herself referred to it. Clearly, it is extremely worrying for extraction to continue against that threat. The National Trust is very concerned about the danger to its own property in the part of the bay that it safeguards. The Northumberland wildlife trust is concerned, and its concern is shared by local residents, by Castle Morpeth borough council and by Northumberland county council.

What is it open to the authorities to do? Town and country planning legislation could allow the local planning authority and Northumberland county council to revoke or modify the two planning permissions, but compensation would be required for the loss of mineral reserves. That could be on a massive scale. The company has talked about a six-figure sum. The resource is not finite, unlike a quarry, in which case one could point to a time when it will be worked out and, therefore, there is a limit to compensation. Because sand keeps reappearing from other parts of the bay, there is no limit of time or quantity and, therefore, potentially a large sum in compensation.

In December 1989 the then Secretary of State for the Environment stated that section 276 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, which has since been superseded, enabled him to revoke a planning permission "if the original decision is judged to be grossly wrong, so that damage is likely to be done to the wider public interest."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. *327*.] Northumberland county council's view is that it might be appropriate to use that power for a planning permission that is clearly outdated and does not even conform to the inspector's initial proposals to safeguard the two sites in question.

In a letter to me in June the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) said that he was not prepared to use that power and that, in any event, compensation would have to be paid by Northumberland county council. I ask the Minister to consider how serious it would be if such a large sum had to be met by the poll tax payers of the county of Northumberland, unaided. The county council would quickly exceed its capping limit if it were to undertake a payment on that scale. It is an unreasonable demand.

At the same time, the Castle Morpeth borough council, in conjunction with its consulting engineers, is considering the possibility of taking action under the coastal protection legislation. Precedents for that are not encouraging. The legislation is not particularly well drafted. There are only two previous cases in which local authorities have successfully applied for such orders in remotely comparable circumstances.

Other forms of campaigning are going on to deal with the problem. Local people are campaigning vigorously, and the Druridge bay campaign, which was originally set up to campaign against a nuclear power station, is now campaigning to secure assurances from local building firms that they will not use sand taken from the site. Two local firms have given indications that they will take that line. The well-known north-east Bowey construction group has said that it will not use sand from the site, and the firm of George Tower of Blyth has said that it will not do so. I hope that the campaign will widen and that many more firms will take advantage of it, but I do not think that that will solve the problem.

It is worth remembering that Northumberland has 16·8 years' supply of permitted sand and gravel extraction within the area and a further 1·8 million tonnes has just been added by a further permission. There is no question of Northumberland in any way failing in its duty to ensure that the construction industry has access within that area to sufficient supplies for the years to come. It has already exceeded the recommended 10-year amount of extracted sand and gravel that it is supposed to allow.

In these circumstances, I ask the Minister to think again about the Department's position. It is not fair to put the entire bill for ending this state of affairs on local community charge payers. In any case, it is not clear that huge compensation is appropriate in this instance. Why should this firm have rights to dig out the beach without any limit on time or quantity? It has already had a good run. This has been a nice little earner, which has been perfectly legal and above board, and which has cost the firm only whatever sum it paid originally and the limited cost of carrying out the extraction and carting the sand away. It cannot be said to be under any great threat if it is considered that the extraction should end without a huge sum being paid in compensation.

However, if compensation is to be paid, why should it be paid solely by the community? Central Government caused the problem by overruling local knowledge and local decisions. I recognise that it was not the present Government, but it was central Government, and the responsibility cannot be left on the shoulders of the local community.

I do not expect the Minister to brandish a wholly new solution to the problem tonight, but I urge him to get his officials to look again at it, to visit the site and to begin discussions with the local authorities involved to find a way to end this uncontrolled and unlimited destruction of the local environment, the cost of which should not fall wholly on the local community, which tried hard to stop this happening in the first place and is therefore entitled to some help from central Government in bringing the problem to an end.

12.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has explained his concerns about this issue with characteristic eloquence and reasonableness and I congratulate him on bringing the subject before the House. I know that his interest in this

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

case is not new as he wrote about it earlier this year to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) when he was Secretary of State.

The hon. Gentleman is lucky enough to have a constituency that is noted for its attractive landscape, including much of its coastline. He speaks of it with justifiable pride and enthusiasm. It is also endowed with a number of important minerals, including coal, sand and gravel. Because of that, it is not surprising that there are concerns arising from the desire to protect and enhance the environment. From time to time, those concerns may appear to conflict with the need to exploit the mineral resources for the benefit of the nation.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I first briefly outlined the Government's policy on the provision of aggregates, of which sand and gravel form an important element. For our economy to function properly, we need a steady and varied supply of minerals. It is Government policy that the construction industry continues to receive that supply at the best balance of social, economic and environmental cost. In the past few years, there has been extensive consultation with the industry and with minerals planning authorities on the preparation of new policy guidance. That guidance is contained in a series of minerals planning guidance notes, seven of which have so far been issued.

The guidance sets out the Government's overall policy and the matters to be taken into account when planning applications are submitted and considered. It also sets out matters to be included in development plans and gives guidance about reclamation and, importantly for the matter before the House, about the review to be undertaken by minerals planning authorities of existing mineral workings. I shall return to that in a moment.

Minerals deposits are not evenly distributed. They can be worked only where they can be found. It is a fact that good mineral deposits are frequently found in areas of attractive landscape, or in areas which, for some other reason, are environmentally sensitive. That can lead to disagreements about whether working should be permitted or, where it is already taking place, whether it should be allowed to continue. In the majority of cases, it is for the minerals planning authority, which is in the best position to judge, to decide on how the best balance of supply against environmental cost can be struck.

I now refer to the importance that the Government attach to the environment in the assessment that has to be made in considering the acceptability of minerals working. Most minerals working causes some environmental disturbance. Most people are aware of the impact that mineral extraction has had and can have on the landscape and on a variety of local features and naturally occurring processes and activities. Although some minerals working may be a relatively short-term activity, in other cases it can last much longer—perhaps for several decades, as in the case that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Environmental concerns are increasing in response to both new planning applications for minerals working and existing activity that may have been authorised, as in this case, many years ago. I welcome today's greater awareness of all kinds of environmental considerations. It is right that they should be properly assessed before any decisions are made. The Government take those concerns extremely seriously. In the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", the Government have set out what has been done and what is proposed. For minerals, attention is drawn to the importance of balancing the interests of amenity against the need to exploit the resource. It calls on operators to take account of best environmental practice.

In recognition of the environmental concerns arising from minerals working and the fact that minerals are a finite resource, the Government have an extensive research programme into sources of materials, environmental effects, reclamation and related issues. Two projects are of particular relevance. One deals with re-use and recycling by using secondary aggregates—the by-products of industrial processes. We hope that that will provide information on the availability of such materials and their potential for use in construction as alternatives to primary aggregates. A second project will investigate sources of supply from coastal superquarries. Some of the projects are already under way and the results will be taken into account when the Government's minerals planning guidance is reviewed.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the problems of old minerals permissions. For some time the Government have been aware of that matter. The Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 provides for a review of mineral workings. It imposes a duty on mineral planning authorities to carry out reviews of mineral workings and to make orders to revoke or modify planning permissions as appropriate with, in some instances, abatement of compensation that may be payable.

The purpose of the review is to monitor all recently active sites or sites authorised but not yet started and to ensure, where practicable, that conditions are consistent with current minerals planning practice. There is no statutory requirement on timing, frequency and manner of carrying out the review. That is a matter for the mineral planning authority. It is also up to the authority to decide which sites should be tackled first. I understand that in the case raised by the hon. Gentleman Northumberland county council has not been able to make much progress on that exercise. But it remains a matter for the county council and not the Secretary of State.

The Government are concerned that that part of the Act does not appear to have been operating as speedily as intended. This time last year a survey by the County Planning Officers Society showed that only some 35 of the 91 mineral planning authorities had started reviews, and progress on the actual reviews that had been started was somewhat patchy. The Government announced in the White Paper their intention to review the operation of that part of the Act, including the compensation arrangements. That review has now started.

I should now like to refer to the site at Druridge bay and to the subject of sand and gravel production in the county of Northumberland. But I must make it clear that I cannot make any specific comment on the merits of the particular case, since under the terms of the review that I mentioned it could come formally before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Druridge bay comprises a five-and-a-half-mile sand beach on the Northumberland coast about 20 miles north of Newcastle. It is backed by sand dunes, beyond which is pastureland. Sand extraction is believed to have been taking place there for about 80 years. In 1960 planning permission was granted on appeal by the then Minister of Housing and Local Government for sand extraction in part of the bay at Hemscott hill. Conditions were imposed

on the depth of working and confined the use of machinery to a small mechanical shovel. Further permission was granted on appeal in 1965 to extract sand at Blakemoor burn to the south of the other site.

A site of special scientific interest has recently been designated at Blakemoor burn and on part of the bay to the north of Hemscott hill. A wildlife reserve has also been recently created north of Hemscott hill.

As the hon. Gentleman said, sand extraction has increased over the years. I am aware that there are concerns about flooding and erosion because of loss of sand in the dunes, because in the past it has been removed faster than it was being replaced. But, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, for the past two and a half years sand extraction at the site has voluntarily been restricted to the Blakemoor burn site, and the dunes and foreshore at Hemscott hill are not being worked. I believe also that there could be other causes of erosion in the bay, notably coal mining subsidence.

The county is an important source for sand and gravel for the nearby Tyne and Wear. Although the county council now has a landbank of permitted reserves of sand and gravel in excess of the 10-year minimum to which Government guidance refers, it is acknowledged in the regional commentary of the northern regional aggregates working party that there could be a shortfall of sand and gravel by the year 2006. The commentary states that

"for sand and gravel to 2006 it is unlikely that extension to some sites will be possible and there could be problems in finding environmentally acceptable new sites in Northumberland accessible to the main Tyneside Markets".

The importance of that site as a source of sand, relative to other sources in the country, therefore needs careful consideration by the minerals planning authority.

Mr. Beith: The Minister has put his finger on a rather important point. If there is a basis for the concern about future supply, it could lead to the full working of the entire planning permissions, including the dunes area, which is voluntarily not being worked at present. That strengthens the case, therefore, for new protection of that area.

Mr. Yeo: Commercial pressures may point in one direction. I dare say that the reasons that led the operator voluntarily to end mining sand at Hemscott hill will still apply with equal force in future.

As I mentioned, the county in which the hon. Gentleman's constituency is situated has much to commend it environmentally. Indeed, I note that significant areas are within the Northumberland national park. Much of the coastline to the north of Druridge bay is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty and identified as heritage coast. I also note, however, that Druridge bay itself does not come within any of those designations.

The hon. Gentleman has requested that the Secretary of State should use his powers to end sand extraction at Druridge bay. I think that it would help if I explained the powers that are available for revoking a permission.

Section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides local planning authorities with powers to make orders to revoke or modify a planning permission if it appears expedient to do so. If planning permission is revoked, the owner or occupier of the land—in this case, the minerals operator—may, in accordance with section 107, make a claim for compensation from the local planning authority. That would be on the grounds of abortive expenditure or sustained loss or damage attributable to revocation. Section 107 specifically provides for the local planning authority to pay the compensation.

If it appears to the Secretary of State that an order should be made under section 97 and the local planning authority has not done so, he may himself make such an order under section 100. Such an order would have the same effect as if it had been made by the local planning authority. Even if that default power were to be used by the Secretary of State, it would still fall to the local planning authority to pay any compensation due. I understand why the hon. Gentleman may feel that, if the Secretary of State has granted planning permission that is subsequently revoked by him, he ought to pay any due compensation. But I am afraid that there is no provision for the Secretary of State to do so.

The Secretary of State has considered a request to use those default powers from the county council, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), the Under-Secretary of State for Energy, explained, on the basis of the information available, he was not persuaded that use of the powers would be justified. The hon. Gentleman will, I am sure, be pleased to hear, however, that the Government are reviewing the operation of the legislation.

I hope from what I have said that I have made it clear that the Government recognise the very real concerns about the environmental impact of mineral operations. As we have said in the White Paper, we plan to issue further guidance on how those matters can be improved. Of course many companies already take environmental considerations seriously, but there is no room for complacency in any of us. It is particularly important that problems should be tackled in a co-operative manner with minerals planning authorities, such as Northumberland, working in close liaison with the industry to see what can be done on an informal basis. That approach has worked successfully in a number of counties and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that there is much to commend it if there is to be progress.

I have listened very carefully and with interest to what the hon. Gentleman said to support the end of sand extraction at Druridge bay. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has considered the issue but concluded that it is a matter for the county council to decide in the light of the prevailing circumstances. It is in the best position to strike the right balance of supply of sand and gravel against the environmental costs. It also has the powers to revoke or modify the existing planning permission.

As I said a moment ago, there is considerable merit in the operators and the county council holding discussions to see what might be done about the present operations without recourse to the statutory powers that are available. I understand that some discussions have started and I would urge both parties to continue that dialogue without delay as a positive and sensible way forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

FRASERBURGH HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

1. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled people he estimates could benefit from the sheltered placement scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): This year, about 6,700 people with severe disabilities are benefiting from the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that about 270,000 people with severe disabilities are in open employment, that another 100,000 are looking for employment and that that compares with only about 6,500 whom the hon. Gentleman says are being offered opportunities in the sheltered placement scheme? In view of the success that Germany is having, with about 90,000 people in such a scheme, will the Minister consider introducing the levy system that exists in Germany to penalise employers who do not offer opportunities to disabled people?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the figures in the report "Employment and Handicap" which are encouraging. They show that substantial numbers of people with severe disabilities are in open employment. But we must continue to provide special placements for others. The hon. Gentleman refers to Germany. Although we are not persuaded that that would be the right approach, we are looking at the whole range of ways of supporting people with disabilities in employment.

Mr. Thurnham: Was my hon. Friend encouraged by the survey showing that nearly 1 million people with substantial disabilities are in work? Does he agree that that adds support to the campaign for a new logo for firms employing disabled people?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We think that the most effective approach to supporting people—there is no disagreement in the House about the importance of helping people with disabilities into employment—is through persuasion and encouragement. The initiative to which my hon. Friend refers is important and we hope that many companies will take it up.

Labour Statistics

2. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he plans to hold discussions with the Trades Union Congress about current unemployment trends.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I have discussed various matters with the TUC on a number of occasions, including at the National Economic Development Council.

Mr. Thompson: In view of the new consensus thinking in the Government, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider encouraging the Prime Minister to advocate urgent talks with the TUC because of the potential increase in unemployment and the problems that we have had in the past 11 years with unemployment?

Mr. Howard: There is no evidence that the TUC has an agreed policy on the matter. It certainly did not make plain any such agreed policy at the recent meeting of the NEDC to which I referred. If anyone has any specific proposals to put forward in relation to unemployment, I shall be happy to consider them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my right hon. and learned Friend had a chance to discuss with the TUC the social charter and how that might affect unemployment in the United Kingdom, particularly the high rate of tax that would have to be put on employees to pay for the type of social benefits that are available in Germany—at great cost to the people concerned and the companies which employ them?

Mr. Howard: I have held discussions with representatives of the TUC on the European Commission's social action programme. I am afraid that the representatives who attended the meeting seemed oblivious of the extra costs—in excess of £3 billion a year—which would be a consequence of only the part-time and working-time directives that are being put forward by the Commission, and of the loss of jobs that those directives would undoubtedly cause.

Mr. Leighton: Unemployment has risen for seven consecutive months and after 11 years of Conservative rule the country is being forced into deep recession. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that that is conclusive evidence of the failure of Conservative policy? Is he aware that instead of our entry to the exchange rate mechanism being a solution to it all, it is likely to inflict an extra 1 million unemployed on this country?

Mr. Howard: No. The hon. Gentleman, who chairs the Select Committee on Employment, knows very well that we have 2 million more jobs in this country now than we did in 1979, unemployment is 45 per cent. lower than it was in 1986 and we have one of the lowest rates of unemployment in the European Community. Those matters are worthy more of congratulation than of the criticism that characterised the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will my right hon. and learned Friend make it absolutely clear in any discussions that he may hold with the Trades Union Congress that, now that we are members of the exchange rate mechanism, excessive wage increases are the fastest possible way to increase unemployment?

Mr. Howard: The exchange rate mechanism makes it absolutely clear that employers must keep all costs rigorously under control and their labour costs are an important component. Therefore, it is extremely important that all who are concerned in wage negotiations should think carefully about the consequences of their actions and think to the future, not simply to what might happen in the short term.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: If the Secretary of State's protestations about all that the Government have done are right, yet the unemployment rate goes up on Thursday, as most hon. Members believe it will, will he say that he is still intent on making £365 million worth of cuts in employment training and training for the long-term unemployed in the next financial year? Will he, instead, ensure that more money goes towards training for the long-term unemployed?

Mr. Howard: I have said that unemployment is likely to continue to go up over the next few months. I have also said that we have been reviewing the best way of helping the unemployed back into jobs, which is not always through employment training. We can offer a great deal of help in other ways, which is why we propose to make up to an additional 100,000 places available in job clubs and through the job interview guarantee scheme to help people back into work as soon as possible.

Part-time and Temporary Work

3. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of his Department's survey into the attitudes of British business men towards European Community proposals on part-time and temporary work.

Mr. Howard: The consultation exercise showed clearly that the vast majority of companies and business organisations that responded recognise that the European Commission's proposals will add very significantly to their costs and will therefore reduce their ability to create and sustain jobs.

Mr. Knapman: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, under those proposals, 1·75 million part-time workers who earn less than £46 a week will be required to pay national insurance? How could anybody, employers or anyone else, support such mean measures? What is the Labour party's position on that?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Labour party, in its blind devotion to the social action programme regardless of its consequences, seems to have forgotten totally its repeatedly proclaimed devotion to the cause of the low-paid, who would suffer most from the Commission's proposals.

Mr. Kirkwood: Has the Secretary of State had any feedback from the Confederation of British Industry and employers' organisations about the proposed EC regulations on night working restrictions? Is he aware that 3 million people in the United Kingdom work night hours, and that the restrictions will make matters difficult for some traditional industries, particularly in rural districts, where night working is an essential part of the regime?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I welcome his support. His party is not renowned for its determination to stand up to proposals emanating from the European Commission. I hope that we can derive some confidence from his words that the Liberal Democrats will agree with our efforts, supported by the CBI and other organisations, to resist those extremely damaging proposals.

Mr. Batiste: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this issue highlights the necessity of having a workable and enforceable definition of subsidiarity at the heart of the Community's constitution, so that matters that have to be determined at a European level are limited to those which need to operate across boundaries?

Mr. Howard: In principle, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. But he should not underestimate the difficulties involved in achieving a satisfactory definition of the term.

Employment Medical Advisory Service

5. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the staff of the employment medical advisory service, within the Health and Safety Executive.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Staffing is an operational matter for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, which are free to deploy their resources as they choose within an overall funding level agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. The commission's plan of work for 1990-91 includes a targeted increase in EMAS staff in post from 134 to 146.

Mr. Eastham: During the past 10 years there have been serious cuts in the employment medical advisory service, considering that an average 8,000 deaths a year are due to occupational diseases. Why were there 79 doctors in 1979 and, in March 1990, only 44? The same applies to nurses in the occupational service: there were 87 in 1979 and only 49 in March 1990. Why do not the Government increase the priority given to this serious matter?

Mr. Forth: My Department acknowledges the expertise and independence of the Health and Safety Executive and Commission and I hope that the hon. Gentleman shares that view. If he does, he should approach the executive and ask it why these numbers have changed. He will be told that it appraised the use of its resources and redeployed them in a way that it considered more effective to tackle the problems that the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned. I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the matter in that light, to acknowledge the independence and expertise of this excellent body and to understand why the changes have been made.

Tourism

6. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to replace section 4 grants for tourism.

Mr. Forth: There are no such plans. I have no reason to believe that there is any need in England for a scheme of Government assistance specifically targeted on tourism projects.

Mr. Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that not only the tourist industries of Wales and Scotland but those of many other countries in the EC which enjoy a much more beneficial climate continue to be grant-aided? Why is England being discriminated against in this way?

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom glories in great variety in its arrangements. The Government have long recognised that the needs of Wales and Scotland differ from those of England—that has been acknowledged throughout the House for many years.

The record shows the success that England has had in attracting tourists. The United Kingdom is the fifth greatest tourist destination in the world. England continues to attract tourists and a level of investment in tourist-related projects to a degree that suggests that any help from the taxpayer would be inappropriate.

Mr. Meale: Why will not the Government change their position? In Mansfield 190,000 customers of the electricity board are still cut off because of the bad weather, as are tens of thousands of other homes throughout the country. How will we rebuild our communities unless we get grant aid to attract tourism and other forms of employment to our areas?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman should be worried that an influx of tourists today and tomorrow would overload the electricity system even more and cause his constituents great difficulty.

Norfolk and Waveney TEC

7. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received from Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council.

Mr. Jackson: I have recently received and approved Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council's corporate and business plans, and I congratulate it on them. The TEC started operations on 12 November.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that a key priority of this TEC is encouraging enterprise and small businesses in an area where 80 per cent. of businesses employ fewer than 25 people? Does he agree, given the new funding arrangements, that this TEC will be ideally placed to play a major part in sustaining the enterprise culture in Norfolk and Suffolk?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the most encouraging developments in the past decade has been the great growth of local enterprise initiatives, including those in my hon. Friend's part of the world. We need to achieve better co-ordination of and focus on all the efforts that are being made and, of course, the role of the training and enterprise councils in that will be important. I note the importance that the Norfolk and Waveney TEC attaches to that theme.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that a great many business people in the Norwich area are involving themselves in the Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council? Will he confirm that that council is in the lead in a programme that is already well ahead of schedule, thanks to this excellent Government initiative?

Mr. Jackson: Since I came to my present post in July I have travelled up and down the country visiting training and enterprise councils. I am afraid that I have not visited the one in Norfolk, but I was in Suffolk last week. I was enormously struck by the amount of commitment and enthusiasm from senior business people. That is one of the most hopeful developments on the current training scene.

Employment Trends

8. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what trends are identifiable in the total number of people employed in *(a)* the public service and *(b)* the wealth-creating part of the private sector.

Mr. Jackson: In mid-1989 there were 20·2 million people employed in the private sector, an increase of 3·6 million or 21 per cent. since 1983; and 6·1 million were employed in the public sector, a decrease of 0·9 million or 13 per cent. since 1983.

Mr. Gill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the welcome trends that he has just announced would rapidly evaporate if the Opposition came to office, because their policies inevitably mean greater burdens on private industry and greater bureaucracy in the public sector?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition have not yet grasped the secret of business success.

Mr. Madden: Is the Minister aware that every week about 400 men and women lose their jobs in the textile and clothing industry? What are the Government doing to ensure that if there is any desperate effort to renegotiate GATT, the British textile and clothing industry will not be sold down the river and again seen as expendable by the Government? What will he do to safeguard employment in British industries to ensure that there are no job losses on that scale in the coming year?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman illustrates what I said in my answer to the previous question: the Labour party does not understand what makes for growth in business. Protectionism does not create growth. We have to focus on the increase in employment that is taking place and the opportunities that are being presented. There are now 2 million more people at work in Britain than there were in 1979. That would not be assisted by protectionism.

Long-term Unemployed

9. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he has announced in the last six months to improve the provision of services to the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Howard: On 8 November I announced that next year my Department will provide up to 100,000 additional opportunities for long-term unemployed people through programmes such as job club and the job interview guarantee scheme. I also announced new flexibilities for training and enterprise councils to make employment training more responsive to individual and labour market needs. These are in addition to the five-point plan that I

announced in April, which ensures that the employment service's advice and guidance services are better able to help unemployed people back to work.

Mr. Brown: Although what my right hon. and learned Friend has announced is welcome, is not the most important point that the number of long-term unemployed has been reduced by 850,000 over the past four and a half years?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: that is certainly an extremely important point. It is also important to remember that more than half the people who are currently losing their jobs get back into work within three months. That is a measure of the help that we can give such people and we hope in future to be able to give them even more.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister agree that the creation of long-term unemployed people by child labour, lack of health and safety standards and lack of trade union rights in other countries would be quite wrong? Does he further agree that the Government should be concerned that textile jobs that are facing such competition should be preserved through the general agreement on tariffs and trade? If those talks collapse the jobs should be protected by the preservation of the multi-fibre arrangement. If not, we cannot use the usual platitude, "a level playing field" because it is savagely unfair competition. Our workers deserve the chance of a decent wage and a decent job.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State dealt with that matter a few moments ago in answer to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). We do not raise our people's living standards by engaging in protectionism. The free exchange of goods and services is most likely to increase the British people's standard of living in future.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that too high a proportion of the long-term unemployed are over 50 and will he reconfirm that his Department is making every effort to ensure that employers do not just leap to the assumption that older workers are somehow finished?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. I assure him that we do whatever we can to achieve the objective that he described. In particular, the employment service always queries any such arbitrary restriction imposed as a condition on a job when that is drawn to its attention.

Mr. Fatchett: Now that the Secretary of State has acknowledged that unemployment will increase during the next few months, will he acknowledge that the number of long-term unemployed will also increase during the same period? Is not that trend of increasing unemployment likely to continue while the Government have only one weapon against inflation—the use of unemployment, with the economic and personal waste that that entails, to fight their own economic failures?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. There is no question of using unemployment as a means of dealing with inflation. If the Opposition have any credible policy to bring down inflation, the Government look forward to hearing of it.

Tourism

10. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the increase in the number of employees in tourism-related employment between 1981 and 1989.

Mr. Forth: The number of employees in tourism-related industries in Great Britain increased by an estimated 219,000 between June 1981 and June 1989, an increase of nearly 20 per cent.

Mr. Harris: Do not those figures show the importance of the tourist industry particularly to areas such as Cornwall? Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite having had two good seasons, partly because of the wonderful summers of the past couple of years, there is no room for complacency and that if we are to compete and maintain such growth we need to offer ever-higher standards and ever-better value for money and increase the amount of promotion?

Mr. Forth: I agree with my hon. Friend, who is well placed to make a judgment on such matters. All hon. Members must pay tribute to those in the tourism-related industries for their ingenuity, activity and quality of service, which have resulted in a constant increase in the volume of visitors and in revenue earned. We in the Department will do everything that we can to support and encourage those industries, which I expect will continue to grow and provide employment and prosperity for a long time to come.

Mrs. Peacock: Does my hon. Friend agree that if more emphasis was placed on attracting business and conference visitors there might be fewer seasonal changes in employment? One would hope that they would come all the year round and spend more money, as is traditionally the case.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. That aspect of the industry is being developed rapidly in many parts of the country, whether my hon. Friend's region or my part of the west midlands. Increased investment is leading to the development and growth of an expert industry and we can confidently expect to attract more high-quality conference business in competition with other countries.

Training

11. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of current total expenditure by the Government on training; and what were the comparable figures for 1979.

Mr. Howard: In the financial year 1978-79—the last complete year under the Labour Government—total Government expenditure on training was £377·3 million. Our planned expenditure in the current financial year is £2,704·5 million—well over two and a half times in real terms what the last Labour Government spent.

Mr. Moate: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that not only has there been a dramatic increase in spending on training by the Government, but back in 1979 there was no youth training guarantee for school leavers, or guarantee of training for the long-term unemployed, and we did not have training and enterprise councils

coming on stream? Can my right hon. and learned Friend suggest any reason why anyone should listen to the Opposition when they failed the country so miserably?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and has identified three of the most telling reasons why this Government have made more advances in training than have ever been seen before in this country.

Mr. Worthington: Why has no money been spent on training this year through the European social fund? The European year will run out in about a fortnight, but no decisions have yet been made on training schemes which should have started last January. Why have Scottish voluntary organisations such as Goodwill and the Scottish Association for Mental Health not yet been informed of European training funding which should have started in January?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. We are making some payments from the European social fund and certain of them relate to training. As I suspect the hon. Gentleman knows, payments were not made earlier because the money was not forthcoming from the fund until very late in the year and because the vast majority of the applications that we received were incorrectly completed and had to be returned to the applicants to be put into the correct form. As soon as we receive those applications in the correct form, payments will be made.

Mr. Paice: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in addition to the tremendous improvement in training expenditure by the Government, industry itself has responded positively to the greater control and power over training expenditure that my right hon. and learned Friend and his predecessors have permitted?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Industry is responding both in the amount of money that it is devoting to training, with current expenditure of about £20 billion per year, and in its unprecedented response to the training and enterprise councils initiative introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Twelve hundred business leaders throughout the country are joining the Government in an unprecedented partnership to revolutionise training attitudes.

Mr. McLeish: It is nearly a year since the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was appointed Secretary of State for Employment. Why is £2 million per week being cut from the training budget, employment rising by 4,000 per week, and voluntary sector organisations throughout the country going out of business because of the Department's incompetence? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the country has no confidence in his ability to deliver any skills revolution?

Mr. Howard: The skills revolution is under way—it is taking place. We are revolutionising attitudes to training both of individuals and of employers. The training and enterprise councils are encouraging employers all over the country, in the unprecedented partnership that I mentioned a few moments ago, to take their responsibilities much more seriously. We are in the van of some of the most far-seeing training initiatives to be found anywhere in the world.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It will take up time.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: In view of your recent ruling on the tabling of questions, Mr. Speaker, is it in order for a member of the Labour Front Bench to circulate questions to be asked by other hon. Members?

Mr. Speaker: I believe that that practice is occasionally common to both sides of the House.

Mr. David Martin: In addition to paying tribute to employers for the role that they are playing, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there will be no going back to the policies of compulsion and direction that were evident in the years before 1979, which were so counter-productive and which the Government rightly reversed subsequently?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is typical of the Opposition to want to take us back to policies that failed in the past, the failure of which our present policies are designed to remedy.

Wages Act

12. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions have been brought under part II of the Wages Act 1986 in the last period of 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: In the 12 months ending 30 November 1990, there were nine prosecutions under part II of the Wages Act 1986.

Mr. Archer: Is the Minister aware of the report, "Crime without Punishment", by the Low Pay Unit, which reveals that there is fewer than one inspector per 5,000 establishments, that in 1989 fewer than 9 per cent. were visited in any way, and that of those visited more than a third failed to keep adequate records and nearly one third were paying rates below the statutory minimum? Is that an example of the Government's dedication to law enforcement?

Mr. Forth: I wonder what the right hon. and learned Gentleman's dedication to the proceedings of Parliament is. We have already dealt with this question on 13 November in oral questions, on 22 October in an Adjournment debate, and in another place on 16 October. Opposition Members will therefore forgive me if I repeat to the right hon. and learned Gentleman what I have told his hon. Friends before—that we are not relying on a policy of prosecutions to make the work of the wages councils effective. We are relying, as the Labour Government did when they were in office, on a policy of information and guidance which we believe will be more effective. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is interested only in prosecutions—knowing his background, I hope that he is not—I can tell him that the number of new prosecutions now being undertaken is almost exactly the same as it was under the Labour Government of which he was a member.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that it does not necessarily follow that, because there have been no prosecutions, it is down to the inspectors? In this day and age, people are more informed of their rights. If employees

are worried about the implications of the Wages Act, why can they not write letters to people who can deal with that? I assume that people are happy with the way in which the Act is working.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. In his usual caring and compassionate way, he has put his finger on the answer. Working people are free, and should feel free, to inform the authorities whenever they believe that a violation is taking place. I share my hon. Friend's confidence that working people are fully capable of doing that.

Footwear Industry

13. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he intends to introduce to aid employment prospects in the footwear industry.

Mr. Jackson: It is vital that industry should adapt to changing circumstances. The Department has given financial support to various training initiatives aimed at helping the footwear industry.

Mr. Vaz: Is the Minister aware of the deep concern and anger at the Government's lacklustre approach to the footwear industry? Does he realise that 68,000 people were employed in that industry in 1979, but that by 1990 the figure had dropped to 45,000, a total of 900 jobs having been lost in the past year? As a matter of urgency, will he convene a meeting with representatives of employers and workers to fashion a common approach to the industry —before it is completely decimated? For the record, will he also confirm that he is wearing shoes which were manufactured in Britain?

Mr. Jackson: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the footwear industry, especially in Leicester. I am not aware where my shoes came from, but I will have a look to check. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman believes that he is doing any service to the industry that he seeks to represent by describing it in such poor terms. It might be relevant to point out that last year the value of footwear exports increased by 9 per cent. The hon. Gentleman must not narrow his focus. If he is interested in jobs, he ought to consider the wider situation in the east midlands, where the number of people in employment rose by 19 per cent. between 1983 and June 1990.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are new marketing opportunities for the British shoe industry in eastern Europe and that these must be developed? However, there is another side to the coin and there is considerable concern about the flood of cheap leather coming from eastern Europe. Will he guarantee to monitor the situation?

Mr. Jackson: Hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that Britain has to be part of a liberal international trading order, and we want to see an opening-up of trade with eastern Europe. However, if such trade is to open up and if we are to sell goods to those countries, we have to be prepared to buy goods from them. One of the goods that they are competitive at exporting is footwear. Of course we need to monitor the situation, but we must maintain an open market approach to eastern Europe.

Manufacturing, West Midlands

14. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of jobs in manufacturing industry in the west midlands *(a)* in 1979, *(b)* in 1985 and *(c)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers of employees in employment in manufacturing industries in the west midlands in June 1979, 1985 and 1990 were 985,000, 693,000 and 650,000, respectively.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister confirm that yet another example of the Government's appalling employment record is that in the west midlands—the heart of British manufacturing industry—there has been a fall in employment, skills and capacity of 36 per cent. since the Government took office? Are the Government the only organisation left who cannot understand that the loss of skill and capacity is the reason for such an appalling trade record?

Mr. Jackson: I have already given the figures for our overall record. A total of 2 million more people are employed now than 10 years ago. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the fundamental importance of manufacturing industry, but we all have to recognise that there is a worldwide trend towards reduced employment in manufacturing. It is happening in every country's economy due to capital intensity and new technologies. We have to take note of the increase in productivity in manufacturing. It has increased by 60 per cent. in Britain in the past 10 years—the fastest increase in any industrial country.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the manufacturing jobs have shifted from the west midlands to the east midlands because the east midlands has a superb work force, excellent industrial relations and welcomes inward investment? Does he agree that the arrival of Toyota in my constituency will have a tremendously beneficial effect on the area and is leading the revival of manufacturing industry in the country?

Mr. Jackson: The west midlands has done well, but so has the east midlands. Telford, in the constituency of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), has become a major manufacturing centre and has experienced a great boom since 1979. There has been an increase of 14,000 jobs in Telford in the past 10 years, mostly in manufacturing. It also includes some 21 Japanese companies.

Training

15. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress to discuss the level of training in British industry.

Mr. Howard: A discussion on training will take place at the next meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 9 January.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister take an early opportunity to talk seriously to the Trades Union Congress about training? Is he aware that training is still at a dismally low level in this country compared with all our industrial competitors? Is he also aware that we are in

the middle of a massive recession which will get much worse and that employers are already pulling out of training? What does he intend to do about that?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman were more interested in facts than fantasy, he would know that one of the most encouraging features of the most recent Confederation of British Industry survey was that, notwithstanding the difficulties that many of them are currently facing, more employers intend to increase their investment in training and innovation than to reduce it. We would not have seen that in the past, certainly not when the Labour party was in office.

Mr. Ian Taylor: When my right hon. and learned Friend next meets the TUC, will he remind it that one of the best unions for training is the electricians' trade union which has its training headquarters in my constituency and, rather interestingly, is not part of the TUC? Does not that suggest that the TUC should pull its socks up?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State visited the training headquarters of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union recently. It has much to show the TUC and a good deal from which the TUC could learn.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

17. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if at his next meeting with the chairman of the Health and Safety Executive he will discuss establishment levels in the nuclear installations inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: The HSE's staffing requirements are reviewed annually as part of the public expenditure survey. On 1 November 1990 there were 248 staff in the HSE's nuclear installations inspectorate, of whom 159 were nuclear inspectors—an increase in inspectors of some 60 per cent. since 1987. Current plans are to recruit to a level of 172 inspectors.

Mr. Dalyell: Given the clean bill of health that the nuclear installations inspectorate has given Dounreay and in view of events in the middle east, should not the Government consider reversing the rundown of Dounreay?

Mr. Forth: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the status of a nuclear installation is not a matter for me or for my Department; my responsibilities are for the Health and Safety Executive. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, who understands these matters well, I can say to him only that I will pass his comments to my colleague at the Department of Energy so that he may have a response from that Department.

Youth Training

18. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had recently with representatives of further education colleges and youth training providers to identify and discourage any duplication of waste in staff, premises, equipment and operational costs.

Mr. Howard: I have frequent discussions with those groups. The introduction of training and enterprise councils will lead to greater co-ordination and streamlining of further education and training provision.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. Is not it the case that where training vouchers are to be introduced next April, students will for the first time be able to shop around between different educational and training establishments? Does my right hon. and learned Friend welcome that?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The training vouchers, which will be introduced in 11 pilot schemes from next April, are just one of the initiatives in which we lead the world. The vouchers will for the first time give young people buying power to ensure that they receive training of the highest quality. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that important initiative.

PRIME MINISTER

Gulf Crisis

Q1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) of 13 November, *Official Report*, column 446, if he will specify those figures which he posesses relating to oil stocks, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide which differ from those given by King Hussein, showing in each case the comparable figures and the source for those which he uses.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): No, Sir. The calculations rest on assumptions about the consequences of a conflict in the Gulf which, by their nature, are not quantifiable. The best way to avoid any adverse consequences is for Saddam Hussein to comply with the United Nations resolutions in full.

Mr. Dalyell: Is not the spine-chilling truth that no mining engineer, no scientist and no politician knows for certain what will occur if 300 deep-mined oil wells are detonated? In those circumstances, might not the fires rage for months, if not years, in a fashion quite outside human experience? In view of that, should not the damage to the planet, let alone the human slaughter and the Arab ecological disaster, rule out any talk of a military option?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman says, no one can be absolutely and precisely certain about the outcome. In so far as it is possible to make an assessment, we see no reason to agree with any of the views put forward thus far as to what the outcome might be.

Dr. Michael Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last week I visited the Council for Higher Education in Amman, where the calculations were carried out for King Hussein? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the horrors of war, whether human or environmental, should be made abundantly plain to Saddam Hussein in particular?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about that, but, on the assumptions that King Hussein used, we believe that some of the difficulties to which he referred would not be precisely as described.

Mr. Livingstone: Will the Prime Minister take time today to read the recently published report of the Association of London Authorities—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Butcher.

Mr. Butcher: While my right hon. Friend is considering the risk of an ecological disaster from airborne pollutants in the middle east, will he bear in mind that there is a risk from Saddam Hussein himself? He has already used chemical weapons, he has developed illegal biological weapons, and he may soon possess nuclear weapons. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to safeguard the security of Iraq's neighbours is for the United Nations to ensure that Saddam Hussein does not keep one piece of Kuwaiti territory that he has gained by armed aggression?

The Prime Minister: The risk to which my hon. Friend refers is there. It is for that reason that there is a most remarkable degree of international consensus that the Security Council resolutions must be met in full.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall today be having further meetings. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Brown: In the course of his busy day, will the Prime Minister consider selling to me any of his personal possessions—one of his houses would be very nice—at 60 per cent. of the true market value? If he is not willing to do that with his personal possessions, why is he willing to do it with the nation's?

The Prime Minister: I have only one house, and I propose to stay there and keep it.

Mr. Gregory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the denationalisation of the electricity industry has been a great success and, furthermore, will ensure that Britain develops as a real share-owning and property-owning democracy?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The offer has been a huge success—clearly the most successful ever—and oversubscribed 10 times. It shows clearly that people are prepared and willing to become share owners in a share-owning democracy.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, as a result of the Government's underpricing of electricity shares, the British taxpayer stands to lose £3 billion or more?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has said something like that about each privatisation. Every privatisation has been a success. Is the right hon. Gentleman proposing to renationalise?

Hon. Members: Answer!

Mr. Kinnock: I will, as Prime Minister after the next general election—do not worry about that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. How can the Leader of the Opposition answer with such shouting going on?

Mr. Kinnock: Selling public assets for 40 per cent. less than they are worth is, by anyone's judgment, a national scandal. Today, with the electricity sale, the British people are being subjected to a national scandal and a great swindle by their own Government. Any Government who inflict that on their own people are guilty of infamous incompetence or great dishonesty, or both.

The Prime Minister: I reject absolutely the right hon. Gentleman's charge, and I repeat the question—will he renationalise?

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister provide me and the British people with a justification for selling off a national asset for £3 billion less than it is worth and, in the course of that, showing the dishonesty of the Government and the willingness of the Government to swindle their own people?

The Prime Minister: There are two points in answer to the right hon. Gentleman. First, the share price absolutely reflects the aim of getting value for the taxpayer. Secondly, in view of what the right hon. Gentleman has said, what on earth was the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) saying when he made the prediction that we would not succeed in privatising the electricity industry?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the deep disappointment in the north-west that Manchester is not the venue for the Olympic games in 1996? Will he bear in mind that yesterday Manchester launched its bid to be the venue in the year 2000? As I expect that my right hon. Friend will still be Prime Minister at that time, may I have an assurance from him that the Government will totally support the British bid for the Olympics in 10 years' time?

The Prime Minister: Not only that—I look forward to attending them.

Q4. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Archer: Reverting to the loss to the Exchequer from the mismanagement in marketing electricity shares, when 3,500 hospital beds are out of commission because of underfunding in the health service, has the right hon. Gentleman reflected that if a local council had made a similar pig's ear of its affairs councillors would face personal surcharges? What sanction does he suggest for incompetence among Ministers?

The Prime Minister: In my view, an offer that is oversubscribed 10 times is a success and not a pig's ear.

Q5. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the chairman of the Haemophilia Society is one of my constituents? Has my right hon. Friend read the

Adjournment debate that I initiated on 15 October, and when does he expect to be in a position to act on this deep human tragedy?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) raised this problem the other day. I can now tell the House that the Government have been examining this matter and have been able to agree in principle to proposals been put forward by the plaintiffs' lawyers. Provided that the proposals are formally approved by individual plaintiffs —and, in the case of minors, by the courts—they should provide a basis for bringing the matter to an agreement successfully and soon. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will inform the House of the details. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will welcome this development, as I do.

Q6. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: When the Prime Minister was elected leader of the Conservative party, the House was aware that during his campaign he had referred to the difficulties facing teachers, and especially their low morale. As he is his own man, what does he intend to do to change policy and to increase morale among teachers?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that morale in the teaching profession is immensely important. It depends on a whole range of factors—not only salaries, but on job opportunities, the quality and nature of education, and the opportunities for advancement within the profession. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is examining all these matters.

Q7. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Paice: Referring back to the earlier questions about electricity privatisation, is not it clear that the lesson from the many privatisation issues in the past few years is that what the public really want when they refer to "public ownership" are share certificates, property deeds and pensions with their own personal names on them? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is true public ownership and that the accumulation of personal wealth which it creates will bode well for the economic future of this country?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is also a matter of some importance that the sale of the 12 discos will raise £8 billion.

Mr. Spearing: Has the Prime Minister seen the document sent to the President of the European Council on Friday by President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl? Does he agree that it contains proposals for adding security, citizenship and foreign affairs to the competence of the European Communities, together with co-legislation of the Parliament and majority voting on all but a few issues? Does he further agree that that creates even more centralism than exists at the moment, thus increasing the democratic deficit? As the documents were placed in the Library after the House had debated these matters last Thursday, will the right hon. Gentleman tell his colleagues in Rome next week that such matters and the way in which the President can introduce business at such late notice is unacceptable and only increases the democratic deficit?

The Prime Minister: I share the underlying concern that the hon. Gentleman has raised about the shortness of notice in such matters. In another sphere, I have raised this issue at ECOFIN on a number of occasions. Decisions taken in the Community should be preceded by proper examination, proper costings and proper consideration. I shall certainly make that point.

Environment

Q8. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to international co-operation on environmental issues.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom plays an active part in the work of many international bodies dealing with environmental issues. We are fully involved in the preparations for the 1992 United Nations conference on the environment and development in Brazil, which includes negotiations on a framework convention on climate change and on biological diversity.

Mr. Hunter: Although I welcome such international co-operation and the Government's part in it, will my right hon. Friend be on his guard against wasteful duplication and abuse of taxpayers' money? In that context, will he look at the work of the European Environmental Statistics Office, the European Environmental Agency, the European Environmental Monitoring and Information System and the European Environmental CORINE Programme? International co-operation is desirable, but the duplication of bureaucracy in the EEC is not.

The Prime Minister: Environmental care is a matter of great importance to the Government, but my hon. Friend is surely right to draw attention to the dangers of duplicated expenditure. I shall bear in mind what he says.

Mr. Wigley: If, as is widely reported in the European newspapers, Chancellor Kohl and other leaders are likely to ask at the forthcoming conference in Rome for a level of elected regional government to be developed within Europe as a counterbalance to centralisation, will the Prime Minister give an undertaking not to rule out the idea out of hand?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter which may conceivably be raised at the weekend. Certainly, I have had no notice that it will be raised. The matter will need to be carefully examined.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. James Pawsey. Mr. Pawsey?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Harry Ewing.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I am grateful both to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

May I take the Prime Minister back to his first answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) when the right hon. Gentleman talked about the military option in the Gulf? Do the Government have any contingency plans to reintroduce conscription and national service to sustain the military option in the Gulf?

Mr. Dickens: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Under the conventions of the House, should not any question that you call be related to question 8?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is always so helpful. However I called question 9. I think that technically the hon. Gentleman may be right but I turned a blind eye to that in view of the absence of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

The Prime Minister: I understand the important question that the hon. Gentleman asked about the Gulf which as he knows, is a matter that we debate frequently in the House.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 1773) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Income Support (General) Amendment No. 3 Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 1776) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 1775) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Family Credit (General) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 1774) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL

Ordered,

That the Representation of the People Bill be referred to a Second Reading Committee—*[Mr. Wood.]*

National Health Service Trusts

3.31 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): On a point of order, of which I have given you notice, Mr. Speaker. A week ago today the Secretary of State for Health announced his intentions to make 56 hospitals into self-governing trusts. In response to my supplementary question, he referred to

"The instruments to set up the trusts, which we shall lay today and tomorrow".

It is now clear that that statement was wrong in two respects.

First, a week after the statement none of the orders has yet been published. Secondly, I am informed by the Secretary of State's office that it is not his intention to lay the orders before Parliament. They are executive orders and it is not required that they be laid before Parliament. However, if he wished, the Secretary of State could lay the orders before Parliament by Royal Command to allow them to be debated.

I submit that two points of order arise from those errors of fact. First, it would be appropriate for the Secretary of State to correct last week's record in *Hansard* and to advise us when he expects to publish the orders and whether he intends to lay them before Parliament. Secondly, if the Secretary of State does not intend to lay the orders before Parliament, it is essential that he advises the House about how the Government propose to permit the House to debate them. They raise matters of principle of considerable importance. They raise matters of particular controversy in the constituencies of many hon. Members. It would be an outrage if the orders were not submitted to any form of parliamentary approval. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I invite the Secretary of State to tell us when the orders will be published and whether Parliament will be allowed to debate them.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): With respect, that was one of the most footling points of order that I have ever heard. It has been explained——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I called the Secretary of State so that he could give an explanation; the point of order was for me.

Mr. Waldegrave: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker.

As has been explained three times to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), by a slip of the tongue, I used the word "laid" instead of the word "made". The hon. Gentleman, having had the benefit of being on the Standing Committee considering the Bill, will know that, owing to the exercising of powers conferred by section 5(1) and paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6(2)(d) of schedule 2 to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, these are statutory instruments. The hon. Gentleman knows that at least as well as I do, and probably better.

The Opposition will have plenty of time to debate these matters. The statutory instruments are now being printed, and will of course be published before they come into force, in an entirely normal way.

Mr. Cook: I regret the tone in which the Secretary of State has responded to the raising of what many hon. Members will recognise as a serious issue.

Closing the discussion on last week's statement, you Mr. Speaker, said:

"I am sure that there will be future occasions on this important matter."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 175 and 181.]

I think that the whole House would agree—certainly the Opposition would—that there should be future occasions for us to debate the matter. [AN HON. MEMBER: "There will."] I hear someone say, "There will." If the Secretary of State does not intend to lay the orders before the House —as he could, if he chose, by Royal Command—what arrangements will he and the Government make to enable the House to debate this important matter? Or do they really intend to hand over 56 hospitals to self-governing trusts while giving constituency Members no opportunity to comment?

Mr. Waldegrave: These are matters for the Leader of the House. I repeat that the hon. Gentleman seems to be scraping the barrel. He is trying to make a point out of a slip of the tongue which has already been explained to him. I know that he can do better and I hope that he will when we debate the matter in the months ahead.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order on the same subject, Mr. Speaker. Some colleagues and I spent all of the Saturday morning following last week's announcement collecting signatures from people protesting against what is happening in my constituency and in St. Helens. What parliamentary occasion will I have on which to present those signatures—1,000 of them—to the Secretary of State for Health? It does not look as though I shall have any opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker: I must not advise the hon. Gentleman on tactics, but, if I may make a suggestion, the Christmas Adjournment motion would provide one such opportunity. There are, of course, other opportunities for hon. Members to present petitions.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that last Thursday I asked the Leader of the House exactly the same question, and received what can only be described as a difficult if courteous reply, suggesting that there would be no such debate. Now the Secretary of State comes before the House, having misled us—I put it as bluntly as that—on the last occasion, when I was here but did not catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. His answer today suggests that he could not care less about the rights of my constituents.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will call the hon. Gentleman, as he is Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Mr. Cryer: As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is not an inconsequential matter. It was agreed at the conference of Commonwealth countries on delegated legislation that it was outrageous for the House to introduce primary legislation enabling Ministers simply to produce instruments without being required to lay them before the House. Surely it would help—although I know that it is not your direct responsibility—if you drew the matter to the attention of the Procedure Committee. With the present Government producing more than 2,500 statutory instruments a year—more than any other Government —it is time that we stopped this loophole for arrogant and arbitrary government.

Mr. Speaker: Let me deal with one matter at a time. I remember very well the conference of which the hon. Gentleman was a distinguished chairman and I recollect the discussion as well. I think that it is for him to draw the matter to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are to have an important debate this afternoon. May I suggest that we draw to a close this idiotic example of a leadership bid by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and get on with that business?

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the opting-out proposals are to be contained in statutory instruments, may I ask for your guidance? Statutory instruments are usually debated after 10 pm and the debate lasts for one and a half hours. Will the statutory instrument be a collective measure covering all 57 hospitals affected by the proposal? If so, do you agree, Mr. Speaker, that it would be desirable to have a full day's debate on it?

Mr. Speaker: Such matters are best raised with the Leader of the House at business questions on Thursday.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept your advice that this is an issue for the Leader of the House, but I must say, on behalf of my hon. Friends and myself, that people will think it extraordinary that, when the wishes of local people about the opting out of hospitals have been ignored, it is apparently also the Government's intention to prevent a debate on the matter in the House. The Secretary of State shakes his head in disagreement. I hope that he will ensure that we have a debate in Government time. I place on record the Opposition's determination to press the Government for a debate in Government time on these important proposals.

The Gulf

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. 8781/90 on revision of the Community's financial perspective as a result of the Gulf crisis, and 8813/90 and 8823/90 on financial aid to the countries most directly affected by the Gulf crisis.]

Mr. Speaker: A large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, so I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 6 and 8 o'clock. I hope that those called before that time, or even after it, will bear that limit in mind in fairness to their colleagues.

3.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): It is right that the House should debate the Gulf crisis from time to time and that it should require the Government to keep it fully informed, and I have tried to respond to Opposition suggestions on the timing of statements as the situation has developed.

Today is an occasion to step back from immediate events, to look at the crisis as a whole and to consider what is at stake. One immediate event is wholly welcome, and that is the release of hostages which is now under way. The total British community in Iraq and Kuwait was just over 1,100 at the time of President Saddam Hussein's last announcement. Aircraft have been chartered from Iraqi Airways to bring our people home and we have taken space on charters organised by others. The community were informed of arrangements by our embassies and announcements over the BBC World Service.

Ninety-three people arrived early yesterday morning, picked up in Frankfurt by the British Airways aircraft that had been waiting in Amman. A further 11 arrived later in the morning by way of Rome. More than 380 arrived at Gatwick yesterday evening by Iraqi Airways and a further 380 are expected this evening. They will be mainly members of the community from Kuwait who were being taken to Baghdad in two planes this morning by Iraqi Airways. Her Majesty's Government are bearing the full cost of chartering the Iraqi Airways aircraft. British Airways generously contributed the operating costs of its flight yesterday, leaving the Government to pay for fuel and war risk insurance. Other people are making their own way, using scheduled flights via Amman. The Government will meet the costs if travellers do not have recourse to funds and we shall organise further charters if necessary. We are strongly urging everyone to leave.

Our embassy in Baghdad will try to establish the exact whereabouts of all who remain. I believe that reception arrangements here have worked well and that co-operation between Government Departments, voluntary organisations and airport authorities has been good.

In two days from now, Her Majesty's ambassador in Kuwait will be the last remaining ambassador carrying on his duties in that country. Mr. Weston and his colleague Mr. Banks have been keen to stay at their posts, so long as by doing so they could give somehelp to our community in Kuwait. If, as I hope, that community—or all but a small minority who wish to stay—is able to return—is able to

return to Britain by way of Baghdad in the coming days, we shall work out with those two brave men how long they should stay. I thank them again for what they have done.

I will comment on the advice that we are giving to British communities in the Gulf region outside Iraq and Kuwait. We are talking of some 50,000 people, more than the community from any other country. At the beginning of the crisis we encouraged some thinning out, but many people have since, for understandable reasons, gone back. At the end of last month, we recommended that school children should not travel out to Bahrain, Qatar or the eastern province of Saudi Arabia for Christmas and that families should get together for the holiday in this country. We also advised that those dependants leaving the Gulf for Christmas should not return until the situation became clearer. We look carefully and constantly at that advice. It is our duty to give the communities the best possible advice, a responsibility which weighs heavily on us. We do not want to cause alarm, disrupt people's lives or separate families unnecessarily. But many British people live in countries which, in the event of conflict, would be at direct risk from Iraqi military action. We keep a close eye on the advice and, because of hon. Members' interest in their constituents, I shall keep the House fully informed of any changes in our advice.

President Saddam Hussein is now complying with one of the three main requirements of the Security Council. Attention can now focus on the other two requirements —the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of the legitimate Government. Ten days ago I was in New York to join in the last Security Council debate on the subject. It was a notable and dramatic occasion. The council adopted, with just two votes against, resolution 678, which empowers the international community to use "all necessary means" to secure compliance with its earlier resolutions if Iraq does not leave Kuwait on or before 15 January next year.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: May I just proceed a little further, and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman before I leave the subject of the use of force? The phrase "all necessary means" includes the use of force. Resolution 678 is not a call to arms or a timetable for military action. The resolution provides for what it calls a pause of goodwill. That was an idea of the Soviet Government. It gives Saddam Hussein a final opportunity to leave peacefully. We hope he takes it.

We support the United States initiative to make sure that Iraq's leaders hear the message loudly and clearly. We agree that, in the effort to avoid war, it is worth going that extra mile. I discussed how that might be done with Secretary Baker and the Foreign Ministers of the other permanent members of the Security Council while I was in New York on 29 November, just after the adoption of resolution 678. President Bush and Secretary Baker will not be bargaining. Their purpose is to speak plainly so that Iraq's leaders understand exactly what is required of them, not by America or Britain, but by the international community, and the consequences if they continue to defy those requirements.

There will be no concessions on the requirements of the Security Council, no partial solution or linkage to other issues. In the European Community last week we decided that the same message would be delivered to the Foreign Minister of Iraq after his visit to Washington by the Presidency of the European Community, probably in Rome.

Mr. Dalyell: Does it bother the Foreign Secretary that one of the two countries that voted against the resolution was one which is nearest and stands to lose most—Yemen —whereas others such as Zaire, where I led the Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation, made it quite clear that the crisis is all about lifting the ban on American aid to Zaire on civil rights grounds, not about the merits or demerits of the Gulf? Will the Foreign Secretary look critically at what the United Nations has done?

Mr. Hurd: The two members that voted against were Cuba and Yemen. I am not sure that Cuba is situated very close to the conflict. Yemen, as an Arab country, has been closely involved, but is not one of those countries closest to the conflict. As the hon. Member knows, the Arab countries closest to the conflict—Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates—are absolutely clear and solid on the matter. The hon. Member is not on a good argument.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Hurd: I shall continue a little and then give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a minute.

Mr. Benn: I just want to ask the right hon. Gentleman one clear legal question.

Is it the Government's view that article 51, plus the resolution passed by the Security Council last Thursday, constitute authority for the use of force by the United States, Britain and others without returning to the Security Council or to the House of Commons?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, it is. We believed, and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen agreed, that article 51 and the original request from the Kuwaitis provided a legal basis; the argument was about whether there should be an additional political basis. That has been supplied by resolution 678.

We continue to read in the media that the unity of purpose in the coalition against aggression is disintegrating. We have read such reports more or less continuously ever since the coalition was formed. Sometimes it is the Arabs in the coalition, sometimes it is the French or the Russians, and sometimes it is the Americans, who, according to the reports, are looking for some compromise that falls short of the requirements of the Security Council. Now, after these weeks, the House can judge for itself and see that that is not true. We are all working for a peaceful outcome. None of us is ready to settle for less than the Security Council requires.

As for linkage, it is common ground between most of us that we have long supported the idea of an international conference on the Arab-Israel problem. That support continues. A conference is a technique, not an end in itself. It needs willing participants if it is to get anywhere. The initiative—Jim Baker's initiative—taken by the United States Government with our support was designed to find a basis on which talks could take place between Israel and the Palestinians, with a view to a conference in due course. That was before the invasion of Kuwait. We believe that the Baker plan was a realistic effort. The invasion of Kuwait set back that search for peace and a settlement

[Mr. Hurd]

between the Arabs and Israel, as did the partial support of the PLO for the invasion. We have no intention, however, of forgetting the injustices and insecurity that persist so long as there is no peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israel problem.

Iraq under President Saddam Hussein has had and could have no useful contribution to make to this search for a peaceful settlement, but once the Iraqis' aggression against Kuwait has been reversed we can and shall again focus our efforts on the search for a peaceful settlement. I hope that the co-operation in recent months between the different countries of the coalition against the aggression will improve the prospects of success.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Given the emphasis on the need to find a peaceful settlement, why do the Government and President Bush appear so impatient with sanctions? Surely, even if they take more than a year to work, they are a much more effective, humane and peaceful means of bringing this man down than the sacrifice of even one British service man.

Mr. Hurd: I am just coming to that argument; it is a serious one and it needs to be dealt with.

I come now to the pressures that the international community—not just British and America—is exerting on Iraq. More than four months after the aggression, those pressures are all peaceful. The most important of them are sanctions, mentioned by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), and the build-up of allied forces representing the so-called military option. There are signs in Iraq that sanctions are having an effect. Basic foodstuffs have been rationed since September. But the Iraqi people are used to hardship. They endured eight years of one of the most bloody and futile wars since 1945 —the Iraq-Iran war. It must be questionable whether sanctions, even if applied over a long period, will undermine the resolve of Saddam Hussein to keep his grip on Kuwait.

Meanwhile—the point omitted by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow—day by day Kuwait is being obliterated from the map. We can read what the hostages are saying as they come back and we can read the Amnesty report and listen to the Kuwaitis. There is no secret about what is happening. Whatever can be removed has been taken to Baghdad. Murder, torture and brutality have been commonplace, as the Amnesty report and later evidence shows. With each day that passes, the likelihood that we shall be able to restore Kuwait to its former position decreases. The Iraqi aim is clear. Iraq is out to eradicate Kuwait as an independent nation. We all welcome the return of foreign hostages from Iraq, as we have just done, but we should not forget the thousands of Kuwaitis who are virtually hostages and prisoners in their own city.

President Saddam Hussein's sophisticated war machine will continue to take advantage of the time allowed to improve its military position. There are now nearly 300,000 Iraqi troops and nearly 2,000 tanks in Kuwait, and work continues every day on improving the defences. Every delay risks increasing the casualties in an eventual conflict. Those are sobering facts which the House needs to take into account in assessing the situation.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): What will happen to the Iraqi civilians now in Kuwait? Will they be removed? I refer to civilians, not military personnel.

Mr. Hurd: If the Iraqi forces withdrew as the Security Council requires, I imagine that the civilians would be wise to follow them.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The Foreign Secretary has said that, because of the enormity of what is taking place in Kuwait, the British Government and other Governments are not inclined to allow sanctions to have a proper chance to work. What is happening in Kuwait is very disturbing, but it will be disastrous for the population of Kuwait if war breaks out there. That is the choice. As the impact of sanctions was always to be on the Iraq Government's overseas earnings from oil, from which they obtain 95 per cent. of their income, it is surely reasonable to allow the sanctions a proper chance to work. That will certainly not happen as a result of the months in which they have so far been applied.

Mr. Hurd: It depends what the hon. Gentleman regards as a proper chance. By 15 January the sanctions will have been in operation for five and a half months and an assessment has to be made. I have tried to give the House the means by which that assessment will be made. Members will have their own sources of information. People may say that sanctions are producing decisive shortages which may lead to Saddam Hussein changing his mind. That would produce a new situation, but, as I have said, in our our view that is not so.

In August Her Majesty's Government committed their forces to the Gulf region for a number of reasons. The first was to defend Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. The second was to deter Saddam Hussein from pursuing his military adventure further. Many other countries, including some of our closest friends and allies, have committed their forces with the same intentions. Those two objectives of defence and deterrence have already been achieved without any military action.

The third reason for sending our troops to the region was to back the United Nations demand—not that of Britain or America—that Saddam Hussein should withdraw from Kuwait. By the middle of January, Britain will have more than 30,000 troops in the area and they will stand beside more than 500,000 others, most of them from the United States and Saudi Arabia itself. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will speak further about that deployment in his winding-up speech. I am satisfied that this accumulation of allied force provides the strongest single hope for a peaceful outcome. Nevertheless—there is no point in having debates such as this if one does not speak plainly—this country faces a risk of war and in that situation every hon. Member is entitled to know on behalf of his or her constituents why that risk is justified. In the age of the sound-bite and the one-minute television interview, this task of communication becomes difficult. Secondary matters crowd in and confuse the issue and immediate questions are put and answered. That is why the House and our debates are so important.

It is not a question of who should rule Iraq—that is not a matter for us. It is not a matter of the price of oil or access to oil. If that were the issue, everyone would have settled with Saddam Hussein long ago. It is not a matter of an American—let alone a British—desire to impose some permanent presence in the Gulf. As the House

knows, we are there because friendly states out of their alarm and anxiety asked us to return. The real issue is a different one and we must keep it clear.

It has taken the world a long time to create even the beginnings of a system of collective security. In the 19th century, war was commonplace. The nation states of Europe blundered through treaties of alliance and treaties of reassurance into the great war of 1914. After that war, the international community experimented, but half-heartedly, with collective security. But the League of Nations was inadequate at its birth and it failed to act successfully even within its terms of reference.

Haile Selassie came to Geneva, to the League of Nations Assembly, to plead his country's cause. The League did not—could not—listen. We did not listen. The Hoare-Laval pact would have placated the aggressor, Mussolini, by giving him part of the country that he had attacked. Are there not echoes there for the House to catch? Is it for a repetition of the Hoare-Laval pact that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is seeking and arguing? Abysinnia was snuffed out. The axis powers saw only weakness——

Mr. Benn: As the right hon. Gentleman has referred to me, will he give way?

Mr. Hurd: May I just conclude the point?

[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I will, of course, give way.

Mr. Benn: The first speech that I heard in the House was in 1937 when Winston Churchill denounced the Tory Prime Minister for his support for the fascists. The appeasement of the pre-war years was Conservative support for Hitler and Mussolini. There was no appeasement—there was active support for fascism. It does not fall to the right hon. Gentleman, who did nothing about Panama, Grenada, the invasion of the Lebanon or the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey, to accuse those who believe that war would be a catastrophe beyond imagining, and that the United Nations should be an agent of peace, of appeasement, and he should withdraw that.

Mr. Hurd: I do not remember, but the right hon. Gentleman might remember—or his father and my father might remember—that when it became known that Sir Samuel Hoare, the holder of my office, had put together with the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, an arrangement by which part of Abyssinia would be given to Mussolini, so that the awkwardness of his aggression should be forgotten, the Foreign Secretary was forced to resign and was swept from office.

Mr. Benn: I have made no such suggestion.

Mr. Hurd: I asked whether the right hon. Gentleman remembered. Some of the things that the right hon. Gentleman has suggested come close to that.

Mr. Benn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am in no way sensitive about my personal position, but when the Foreign Secretary argues, by parallel with the Conservative Foreign Secretary, Sam Hoare, that I have argued that a part of Kuwait should be handed to Iraq, he is misleading the House and the country.

Mr. Speaker: With any luck, the right hon. Gentleman will be called in the debate and he will be able to make his points then.

Mr. Hurd: If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that he agrees with us that Saddam Hussein should withdraw completely and totally from the whole of Kuwait, I will withdraw any reference—

Mr. Benn: Withdraw it now.

Mr. Hurd: I would certainly withdraw any reference to the right hon. Gentleman. But there are certainly people who have argued that Iraq should be allowed to retain at least part of Kuwait—two islands, an oilfield, and so on. If the right hon. Gentleman is not among those, and if he is in favour of total Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, I withdraw my reference to him.

Mr. Benn: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I spent three hours with Saddam Hussein. I reported back to the right hon. Gentleman and to the American ambassador. The right hon. Gentleman knows very well, because I told him, that I told President Saddam Hussein that Iraq must comply with the United Nations resolutions, and it is in the early-day motion which I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have tabled. The right hon. Gentleman is doing what Tories always do in a crisis—they smear those who challenge them.

Mr. Hurd: I withdraw my reference to the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Benn: Withdraw.

Mr. Hurd: I have already done so. But I hope that it will go out as the clear view of the House that President Saddam Hussein should withdraw not from part but from the whole of his aggression against Kuwait. If that is established as the universal view of the House, that is a major step forward.

Mr. Benn: But not to war.

Mr. Hurd: I shall come to that in a minute, though I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is not blurring his position again. I hope that it is established that the withdrawal from Kuwait should be total and absolute.

For the 40 years of the cold war, the Security Council worked imperfectly and too often it was ineffective. Things have started to change and we have begun to make the United Nations work. All five permanent Security Council members are meeting frequently, talking openly and acting constructively together. We have the same aims. In fact, we have a better chance of collective security than at any other time this century. But there is a subscription to pay —if one may so put it—for collective security, in terms of collective action when aggression occurs. There can be little respect for those who want the benefits of collective security but are not willing to find that subscription.

Some senior hon. Members have fought in a war, but most of us have not. However, we all have enough imagination and sense of responsibility to know that war must be the last resort. No one should believe—here I agree with points made by Opposition Members—that forcing Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait would be a quick or easy operation. No one should suppose that the aftermath of conflict would be painless or straightforward. We respect the belief held by pacifists that in no circumstances is war justified, even though that means that aggression and evil of all kinds may sometimes be allowed to succeed. The rest of us—probably most right hon. and

[Mr. Hurd]

hon. Members—accept that there are circumstances in which peace-loving nations may, and indeed should, use force to prevent and to reverse aggression.

We do not argue that in any blithe or careless manner. We prepare the military option, we seek and we gain authority for the military option because in sober judgment we see the experience of that option—the possibility of that option, the existence of that option—as the last and most powerful peaceful pressure on the aggressor.

The latest Security Council resolution—resolution 678—is not a bluff. The legal authority to use force has been there for some time and the political authority has now been given by the Security Council. That is the strongest possible expression of collective security.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of collective security and to stress the need to prepare to use force if Iraq does not withdraw from Kuwait. Will he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence make it equally clear that if war comes, it is likely to be protracted and bloody, and will not only engage British forces already in the Gulf but make it necessary to mobilise appropriate reserves, including air reserves? As it is likely to be largely an air war, the air element will decide the outcome of the conflict. The United Kingdom has very poor air reserves, but the United States has utilised 45 per cent. of its air transport to the Gulf from its reserves. Will my right hon. Friend make a similar commitment at this time?

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will deal with that point when he winds up the debate. One cannot predict with any exactness the length of a conflict of this kind. I have just said that no one pretends that it will be quick or easy.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Secretary of State for Defence said so only last week.

Mr. Hurd: No, no one has ever pretended that.

Mr. Cohen: The Secretary of State for Defence said that "the operation would be short, sharp and quick".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 167.]

Mr. Hurd: The existence of the military option is the strongest possible expression of collective security and the strongest possible incentive for Iraq to reverse its aggression. That military option is gaining formidable strength on the ground and in the air and Britain is adding notably to that strength.

The aim is a peaceful solution. The Iraqis see the array that is now building up against them. They know of the authority that is backing that array, which now comes from so many nations and from the United Nations. Now that it has become clear and is no longer blurred, they have a powerful incentive and reason to comply. Let us keep the message clear and not confuse it with secondary issues. The message is a double one—if the aggressor stays in Kuwait, he will be forced out; if he leaves Kuwait and complies fully with the Security Council resolutions, he will not be attacked.

There is a peace option. It is in Saddam Hussein's hands. We are working for peace and will go on working for peace, but the doctrine of peace at any price leads not to safety but to danger.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: Our policy is clear, firm and reasonable. In commending it to the House, I hope that it will have the backing of all who believe in the possibilities of collective security and a safer world.

4.9 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): It is now 19 weeks, more than four months, since the Gulf crisis broke. In the Labour party, we have been guided by two principles during that period. The first is that the House of Commons must regularly have the opportunity to discuss the crisis and the role of the United Kingdom in it. That is why we asked for the recall of the House in September. That is why we have asked for and obtained a series of statements from the Government. That is why we have tabled a series of private notice questions and that is why we asked for today's debate. The debate is being held at the request of the Opposition. We thought that it was especially important that the House should have the opportunity to discuss the situation before we rose for the Christmas recess, bearing in mind the date of 15 January contained in United Nations resolution 678, which was carried by the Security Council the week before last.

Our second principle—of paramount and overriding importance to us—is that the role of the United Nations shall be central to all actions taken to resolve the crisis and that the decisions and policies of the United Nations must at all times be upheld and supported. That is all the policies and all the decisions. That includes the authorisation, in resolution 660, of negotiations between Kuwait and Iraq, following unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait by Iraq, and it includes the insistence, in resolution 660 right through to resolution 678, of complete and unconditional withdrawal by Iraq from Kuwait. It is important to bear it in mind that the international coalition responsible for those resolutions is supported by the League of Arab States.

The League of Arab States made a specific declaration, after the first United nations resolutions were passed, supporting those resolutions calling for the unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait.

Four months after the outbreak of the crisis, it is important to recall how it began. Many right hon. and hon. Members will wish to discuss the issue of force—whether it is right to use it and, if so, at what point and with what justification. It is understandable and right that the House should consider so grave a possibility. Further, it is right to remember that force has already been used in this crisis. Force started this crisis, with the unprovoked military invasion by Iraq of Kuwait, an innocent and peaceful neighbour.

There has been killing in Kuwait, as newly returned hostages have confirmed and described. Kuwaiti refugees, whom I met when I visited the Gulf, described to me how babies had been torn from incubators. There has been rape. There has been looting on perhaps an unprecedented scale. When the House, in a sober mood, considers how

best to respond to the crisis, it is right that we should remember how it began and why the United Nations Security Council responded as it did.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): The right hon. Gentleman talked about the way in which the conflict began. Does he recall that the Kuwaiti Government lent billions of pounds to Iraq to assist it in its war against Iran and when the Iraqi Government visited Kuwait and asked it to waive those massive loans it would not agree to do so? Saddam Hussein returned to his country, mobilised his army and caused all this death and destruction because he was unwilling to repay a loan. In other words, he welshed on a debt.

Mr. Kaufman: On 7 September I referred to the fact that Iraq had——

Dr. Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) has used an unparliamentary expression about a minority nationality within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) accused the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) of having welshed on a bet. Nevertheless interventions of that kind are best made in a speech if the hon. Gentleman is called.

Mr. Kaufman: I am not sure to what extent the intervention of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) was necessary since the information that he sought to provide, without the objectionable word he used, was well known to all hon. Members. There were, of course, other reasons for the invasion, including a dispute over oil prices and oil production, access to the Gulf and other matters. It was a complex set of circumstances.

The Security Council has now passed 12 resolutions dealing with the matter. Since the House met in September it has passed seven resolutions and, in addition to resolution 678 carried the week before last, they have included the authorisation of an air blockade to enforce sanctions.

Since the House last debated the issue, there have been two other important developments. First, there was the invitation by President Bush to Saddam Hussein for talks between the United States and Iraq. Despite the problems encountered in fixing suitable dates, we hope that the talks will take place soon. They could play an important part in resolving the crisis. Secondly, last week Iraq, in announcing the unconditional release of all foreign hostages, complied with Security Council resolution 664. That is an important success for the United Nations sanctions policy. Apart from our satisfaction that the inhuman and illegal detention of innocent persons is coming to an end, the Labour party is particularly gratified that, for the first time, Iraq has complied with a Security Council resolution. We now call upon Iraq to comply with the other 11 resolutions and withdraw from Kuwait—all of Kuwait.

There is one simple and obvious way for the crisis to be resolved peacefully and without further bloodshed and loss of innocent lives, and that is for Iraq to reverse its act of aggression and withdraw from the territory that it holds illegally and against every principle of international law. Let Iraq withdraw now. If Saddam Hussein does not withdraw speedily, two options remain to secure his compliance with the United Nations resolutions—the use of force and the use of sanctions. I put them in that order not to imply a preference for force but simply because I wish to put to the House in a considered way what the Labour party has said about each of the options.

There is no doubt that at any time since 2 August article 51 of the United Nations charter could have been invoked to trigger the use of force. Article 51 says:

"Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security."

The applicability of article 51 to the crisis was specifically endorsed in Security Council resolution 661, which was passed on 6 August. That was the resolution which imposed economic sanctions. It included an affirmation on what it called

"the inherent right of individual or collective self defence, in response to the armed attack by Iraq against Kuwait, in accordance with article 51 of the Charter."

There can be no doubt about that. Since 2 August, it has been open to Kuwait to request friendly countries to liberate its territory by force under article 51.

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The matter is not quite as straightforward as the right hon. Gentleman suggests. If he rereads article 51 carefully, he will see that the individual right rests until the United Nations itself takes over. That means that no individual right to the use of force is left after the United Nations takes over. The use of force by the United Nations has to be put forward by the Security Council and not by individual states.

Mr. Kaufman: In a moment, I shall come to why I do not support the use of article 51. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) would have been correct if the United Nations Security Council had not passed resolution 661. Resolution 660, which was passed on 2 August, was the straightforward resolution on the day of the invasion which called for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally. One would have assumed that, under the part of article 51 to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred, the right of invoking article 51 was then subsumed by the decision of the United Nations in resolution 661 to take sanctions action. That would have been my assumption and that is why I regard it as significant and remarkable that, while the United Nations took that action in resolution 661, it also reaffirmed in that resolution

"the inherent right of individual or collective self defence, in response to the armed attack by Iraq against Kuwait, in accordance with article 51 of the charter."

The Security Council said that, despite the part of article 51 that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup has quite properly quoted, article 51 remained as a resource to Kuwait should it wish it.

I want now to explain to the House why, even so, we in the Labour party have not believed in the invocation of article 51 in any case. When she was Prime Minister, the

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right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) several times cited article 51 as a justification for the use of force, and the Foreign Secretary did so many times. However, throughout the crisis, we in the Labour party have repeatedly stated our concern about the use of force under article 51. The Foreign Secretary can confirm that, in my conversations with him, I have repeatedly warned against using article 51 as a justification for force.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition repeated the warning in his speech to the House on 6 September. On the following day, I said:

"It is not enough to be able to argue a technical case under article 51 . . . If the international consensus is broken as a result of action that key permanent members of the Security Council either cannot support or actively oppose, not only will there be no effective United Nations machinery available to police a settlement, but there will not be a settlement to police."

In my speech to the Labour party conference in October, I quoted a declaration by the Trades Union Congress. It said:

"It would be damaging to the UN and to the interests of working people caught up in the crisis if resort was made to unilateral military action. It is essential therefore, if the UN is to fully develop its role and enhance its authority that it should have the full backing of government and that they act consistently in upholding the Charter."

On 7 September, I said:

"We"—

that is, the Labour party—

"believe that any further operations found necessary . . . should . . . be clearly and unequivocally authorised by the United Nations."—[*Official Report*, 7 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 892-93.]

That has been the Labour party's position throughout.

On a naval blockade, the Government at first said that article 51 was sufficient authority and justification. I, on behalf of the Labour party, called for a Security Council resolution, and one was in due course passed. On an air blockade, the Government at first said that article 51 was sufficient authority and justification. I, on behalf of the Labour party, called for a Security Council resolution, and one was in due course passed.

I know that the House will accept that I do not cite those examples in any way to score points. *[Interruption.]* It is foolish for Conservative Members to scoff when I am trying to put a serious argument on these matters, but I am afraid it is typical of the small minority of silly Conservative Members.

I cite those points to illustrate and emphasise that, at all stages of the crisis, the Labour party has insisted on clear and unequivocal United Nations authority for any action taken. Of course, on the gravest form of action—the use of force to compel Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait—we have been especially firm. In the House on 6 September, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, said:

"if military action were taken when sanctions had been in force for only a matter of weeks or months, or when there had been no further provocation, or when there had been no further effort to achieve agreement to a mandate to attack, either in the Security Council or in the military staff committee, that military action could shatter the consensus that has been built."—[*Official Report*, 6 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 747.]

That is the argument that my right hon. Friend put to the House when we debated this matter. It was on that basis that, in October, the Labour party conference overwhelmingly carried a statement that declared that the United Kingdom Government's decision to send British forces to the region was "necessary and justified". It may be noted that, at our conference, even a resolution that was rejected as being too limiting on the scope of action by the United Nations, and therefore defeated by 4,862,000 to 625,000 votes, nevertheless called on the British Government not to commit forces to international operations against Iraq

"unless they have explicit authorisation under a resolution passed by the Security Council."

I have since restated our clear position on a number of occasions. I said that

"there should be clear United Nations authority if force was to be invoked and that that authority must be obvious not simply to legalists invoking article 51 of the United Nations charter, but to the judgment of the world community".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 337.]

On 8 November, during the debate on the Queen's Speech, I stated:

"We"—

that is, the Labour party—

"are extremely keen that United Nations authority should be available for any action that is taken, if action by force should be taken."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 160.]

Even at that stage the Government still publicly regarded article 51 as sufficient, but, the next day, following the visit to London by Mr. James Baker, the United States Secretary of State, the United Kingdom Government finally accepted that a Security Council resolution was necessary to authorise the use of force. That resolution was carried on 29 November, and, in accordance with the stand that my party has taken throughout the crisis, I told the House that that resolution fulfilled the stipulations that we had repeatedly laid down since 2 August.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I ask the right hon. Member a question that is asked in other places: "Is that the verdict of you all?"

Mr. Kaufman: The Labour party has a firm policy, carried overwhelmingly by our party conference, and everybody who cites conference decisions must accept that policy.

A resolution authorising the use of force—Security Council resolution 678—has been carried. The question we have to consider is whether that resolution, and therefore that use of force, should be invoked. War is a dreadful option. No one should imagine for a moment that a war to liberate Kuwait could be painless—the clean, surgical strike calmly referred to by those whose lives would not be at risk in such a conflict. When I went to the Gulf, I visited our service men there. I met and conversed with many from my area, including the son of a constituent. If there is a war, and if there are casualties, those casualties will not, for me, be abstract. I shall see before me the eager faces of the young men whom I met.

It is possible that a war could be speedy and relatively free of casualties, but no one should launch a war on that assumption. Any launching of war should always be on the worst case assumption. A few weeks ago, I had a discussion on this very matter with Yitzhak Rabin, the former Prime Minister of Israel, who was chief of staff at the time of the six-day war. He pointed out that, although that conflict is known as the six-day war, when it was launched, the Israelis had no idea how long it would last,

how many people would be killed or what the outcome might be. As Mr. Rabin said to me, "It is easy to go into a war. It is less easy to know how you will come out of it."

The overwhelming preference of the Labour party, which I am sure is the overwhelming preference of the House and of the country, is for a resolution of this crisis by the use of sanctions to force the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. I put this view in the House nearly two months ago, when I asked the Foreign Secretary to

"confirm that it is our objective that sanctions should achieve the liberation of Kuwait, with force an option to be invoked by the international community only if there is clear evidence over a sufficient period that sanctions cannot achieve that United Nations objective"—

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I will not, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because I have a careful argument that I should like to pursue.

The Foreign Secretary told me in reply that I had

"stated exactly the position that we all take."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 337-38.]

Resolution 678, passed on 29 November, authorised the use of force, or necessary means, to uphold and implement the Security Council resolution unless

"Iraq on or before January 15 1991 fully implements"

the United Nations resolution. The insertion of a date in that resolution took place at the insistence of the Soviet Union as a condition of that country's support of the resolution. The date was chosen by the Soviet Union. The United States, which sponsored the resolution, did not want a date inserted into it. However, international consensus was required and both a date and any date were part of the process of achieving that consensus. Last week, on 4 December, the spokesman of President Gorbachev, Mr. Vitaly Ignatenko, said:

"The time to implement this resolution is available. The goodwill period is quite sufficient. We emphasise that the resolutions are not ultimatums. It's a last chance to look at what they have done and find a way out".

Stipulation of the date does not necessarily trigger the use of force on or immediately after that date. We in the Labour party repeat our position that the option of force should be invoked only after the maximum time has been given for sanctions to work——

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West) *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue.

We should not be hemmed in by the date of 15 January. We should not be boxed in by the compulsion of the desert timetable and the effects of the weather on the ability to wage war. If a longer haul is judged likely to achieve the effect of sanctions, we should not rely on other considerations to reject the longer haul.

Important considerations must be borne in mind. How long can the international consensus on sanctions hold together? Clearly the impact of sanctions must not be allowed to fray, or their credibility will not survive and they will cease to be an effective option. How long will Saddam Hussein believe that the United Nations is determined to oust him from Kuwait if the option of force is not invoked and if sanctions remain the only instrument for ousting him? Those are the vital questions which must be answered, and whether to use force and, if so, when will depend on getting those answers right.

I repeat that it is the overwhelming wish of the Labour party to use sanctions rather than force to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, but he must be ousted from Kuwait unconditionally, as the United Nations resolution states, and from all Kuwait. In this House and at our conference, the Labour party has made it clear that if, in the end, the only way to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait is by force, force will have to be used.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): My right hon. Friend will have heard the Foreign Secretary's reply to a question asked earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) about whether the Government believe that they now have the power to initiate a war without reference back to either the United Nations or the British House of Commons. Will my right hon. Friend explain the position of the official Opposition on this point?

Mr. Kaufman: We take a very clear view, which I shall continue to amplify before I sit down, which is that, in the end, the will of the United Nations must prevail. That is the key criterion: the will of the United Nations must prevail, preferably without the use of force, but in resolution 678 the United Nations has now authorised the use of force. We hope that it will not be used, but it is there with the United Nations' authority to be used.

There are two reasons why we in the Labour party take the view that Saddam Hussein cannot be allowed to remain in Kuwait and why we say that unequivocally. First, if Iraq were allowed to retain Kuwait despite the clearly and repeatedly expressed determinations of the United Nations that he should get out, he would, quite simply, have won. He would know that he had defied the international community with impunity.

An Iraq that had swallowed Kuwait and got away with it would be an Iraq that bestrode the middle east. It would be an Iraq with the power already to wage chemical and biological warfare and with nothing to stop it from acquiring nuclear weapons. A triumphant Iraq which, having got away with one act of aggression and taken control of 20 per cent. of the world's oil, might at some stage feel free to move further into Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. It might feel free to absorb Jordan and it might confront Israel.

I hate the idea of a war to free Kuwait. I hate even more the possibility of a wider middle east conflagration that could involve the use of nuclear weapons, the consequences and implications of which would be incalculable.

The second reason why Iraq cannot be allowed to remain in Kuwait is that if it did so, that would shatter the United Nations. I have been asked repeatedly throughout the crisis whether we in the Labour party support the Conservative Government on this issue. I have repeatedly replied that that is not the right question. The right question is, "Do we in the Labour party support the United Nations?" The answer, in accordance with our party constitution, is that we do, absolutely and unequivocally. The right question is, "Do the British Conservative Government support the United Nations?" Repeatedly we in the Labour party have pressed the Government to support the United Nations and act only through it.

I said in the House on 7 September that the Labour party would not give the Government a blank cheque. We

[Mr. Kaufman]

have not given them a blank cheque. We have pressed them both publicly and privately to act only in accordance with clear and unequivocal United Nations' authority. That is the test by which we have judged the Government's actions, and by which we shall continue to judge their actions.

It is utterly essential that the will of the United Nations should prevail on the matter of Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Lamble: What about the House of Commons?

Mr. Kaufman: I respect my hon. Friend's view. I know that he has sincere pacifist principles. Anyone in the Labour party must always respect those principles. But we in the Labour party have a commitment to the United Nations, and that commitment must prevail.

Mr. Benn: Is it my right hon. Friend's view that the Government should commit British forces to action without the explicit consent of the House of Commons? The Democrats and many others in the United States Congress are demanding that their consent should be obtained.

Mr. Kaufman: The constitutional position in the United States is, of course, different from the position here. The Congress is part of the Government and it believes that its consent is required. There is a dispute between the executive and the legislature on that point. I have said many times, and I said at the beginning of my speech today, that the Labour party has continually brought the matter before the House. As the 15 January deadline is only a day after the return of the House from the Christmas recess, we specifically asked that the House should debate the matter before the Christmas recess. Regardless of any constitutional niceties, we believed that the House should have the right to debate this issue.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) used the word "decided". If it is a matter of deciding, and if deciding deals with his misgivings, he can be sure that there is a majority on the Conservative Benches—regardless of the view on the Opposition Benches—for such a decision. My right hon. Friend said at the Labour party conference that if we did not vote in the way in which he wished us to vote we would give a mandate for war. The Labour party did not vote in the way in which he wished us to vote.

Mr. Benn: May I point out to my right hon. Friend that I did not speak at the Labour party conference?

Mr. Kaufman: I do not know whether my right hon. Friend could have reversed a vote of 600,000 to 4,800,000, although I know that his eloquence is considerable.

We are clear that the United Nations is being tested by this crisis. Twelve Security Council resolutions have been carried—the strongest series of resolutions ever carried by the Security Council. The resolutions authorised sanctions, blockade and force. If they are not complied with, the Security Council will have been seen to be nothing but an empty and futile talking shop. There will be no point in the Security Council passing any more resolutions on anything. There will be no point in its having any more meetings on anything. There will be no point in the Security Council even existing. Chaos will rule the world.

Yet if the Security Council prevails and its authority is demonstrated as never before, instead of world chaos there will be the basis and precedent for world order. The United Nations will begin to acquire authority to deal with other vexed issues such as the western Sahara, Kashmir and Palestine. If the Security Council fails on Kuwait, there will be no hope of compelling an intractable Israeli Government to respond to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination. However, if the Security Council succeeds on Kuwait a precedent will have been set for the western Sahara, Kashmir and the Palestinians.

We in the Labour party have long joined with the four permanent members of the Security Council, the Israeli Labour party, the League of Arab States and the Palestine Liberation Organisation in calling for an international conference to deal with all the issues in the middle east. It could achieve peace treaties between Israel and Syria and Jordan and Lebanon, the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, Palestinian self-determination with built-in guarantees for the security of Israel and all other participating countries, and provision to find a decent solution to the ordeal of the Palestinian refugees. It could rid the middle east of nuclear and chemical weapons and prevent any other nations from acquiring a nuclear or chemical capability. It could work for an international code of practice to limit and control arms sales in the region. Not only to solve the Kuwait issue but for the even more crucial reasons that I have listed, I am adamant that the United Nations must succeed in the objectives that it has set itself on Kuwait.

There is no need for a vote tonight. If there is a vote, I shall vote in the No Lobby. For 11 years I have worked in the House against this Conservative Government and I shall not rest until they are defeated in a general election. I shall not vote in the No Lobby because I have any appetite for voting in the same Lobby as the Government. But I shall vote in that Lobby without hesitation because I want to send a signal to Saddam Hussein that the Labour party is unequivocal in its support of the United Nations, that we do not pick and choose between the articles of the charter or between Security Council resolutions, that we accept the entire charter, that we uphold all the resolutions and that we shall not yield or rest in our determination that order shall rule in the world and that that order shall be based on the authority of the United Nations Organisation.

4.47 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I thank my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary for both the tone and content of his speech, which were welcome. I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence replies to the debate he will be able to deliver his speech in the same way.

I wish to finish the discussion that I had across the Floor of the House with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I accept entirely that he wants United Nations action. But I still disagree with his interpretation of article 51. If he looks again at resolution 661, he will see that it does not say that the right exists in place of or as an alternative to article 51. It says that the right is in accordance with article 51. It reiterates the present position in resolution 660. I say that only

because on a future occasion it may be of even greater importance that action should not be taken by an individual power.

I was glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's words about the hostages who are now returning to England in large numbers. I shall make just one point about that, drawn from the experience that we have had since a considerable number of hostages returned with me a few weeks ago. There is a major problem of adjustment to the conditions of ordinary life. That is, perhaps, true of those who were with me because most were ill, some dying, and others were very old and infirm; but I suspect that it is even more true of those who have been in hiding in Kuwait, as well as those who have been in Iraq, experiencing reasonable conditions but denied their freedom.

I hope that the Government will do everything possible to arrange for a service to be provided for those people. It would probably be best if the means for them to contact counsellors were set out in a leaflet which could be given to them on the planes, or when they arrive at Heathrow or Gatwick. It will then be up to them to seek advice, but I know that many counsellors up and down the country would be only too willing to help them through what is bound to be a difficult four, six or eight-week period after their arrival.

Before I deal with the basic issues, let me say a word about Jordan. When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke about the countries close to Iraq, he did not mention Jordan: no doubt that was not a deliberate omission from the long list that he gave. Jordan has suffered more than any other country—apart from Kuwait—as a result of the Iraqi move, and it is still suffering. According to the latest figure that I have been given, it has dealt with 808,000 refugees who have passed through it, excluding Jordanians themselves.

The United Nations estimates the cost to Jordan as some $60 million, but Jordan has been given only $4 million to help to cover that cost. Survival is therefore a major problem for Jordan. It has been calculated—again, by the International Monetary Fund—that, if the crisis continues for the rest of the year, Jordan will lose over 55 per cent. of its gross domestic product this year.

We must ask how long Jordan can last out in such circumstances, and what we can do to enable it to survive economically. King Hussein has been a friend of ours for many years, and has supported us often in the middle east—as, indeed, we have supported him—but, in the present circumstances, it is difficult to see how, without immediate action, Jordan can survive. I am afraid that there are those, particularly in the United States, who say, "Do what we tell you, and then we shall see whether we can help." In my view, that is not diplomacy: it is not the way in which to treat a friend who is in great difficulty. The right way is to try to understand his position—in this instance, a unique position in relation to Iraq—and then say, "In what way can we help? We will do so as speedily as possible." I hope that the Government will be able to deal with this matter speedily, because it is urgent.

Let me now turn to the main issues in what is a very sober debate. Having recently travelled in Europe, the middle east and the far east, and across the United States, I have returned to hear noises that make this—in part of the House—the most bellicose unit in the world. I shall not allow that to dismay me; I think that we must deal with the situation as we find it, here and in the middle east.

Resolution 660 was the first to be passed by the United Nations, and governs all its other resolutions, which are there to amplify it. It contains three short paragraphs. The first

"condemns the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait".

The second

"demands that Iraq withdraw immediately and unconditionally all its forces to the positions in which they were located on 1 August 1990";

The third

"calls upon Iraq and Kuwait to begin immediately intensive negotiations for the resolution of their differences and supports all efforts in this regard, and especially those of the League of Arab States".

The important point is that paragraphs 2 and 3 both use the word "immediately"; they are therefore together. It is remarkable that, in all the speeches made by President Bush, Mr. Baker and the Front-Bench spokesmen in the House, paragraph 3 has never been mentioned, although it is just as important as paragraph 2.

If paragraph 3 is to be carried through in the same way as paragraph 2, there must be discussions with Baghdad as well as with the Kuwaiti Government in exile—the emir and his relations—about how they are to resolve their differences. I should have thought that in the first place this was a matter for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, but, from all the inquiries that I have made, I gather that he seems to have been put into a straitjacket, so other means must be found. There is an urgent need for members of our Government to play a part in arrangements for paragraph 3 to be dealt with at the same time as paragraph 2.

The former Prime Minister said that there is nothing to discuss, but there is an immense amount to discuss—for instance, the question of unconditional withdrawal. I said to President Saddam Hussein—having dealt first with the hostages—that there should be an immediate withdrawal, to which he replied, "If I withdraw, what undertaking will you give me that the Americans or the British will not move into Kuwait and then be in a better position to wage war against me than they are at present?" I said, "I can give you no undertaking; I have no status." My answer is, however, that the Arab League itself must form a buffer round Kuwait, and, if necessary, to the north of Kuwait, to guarantee that the forces now in Saudi Arabia do not attempt to go into Kuwait and put themselves into a better tactical and strategic position.

My view was reinforced by what the Secretary of State for Defence said on 7 September:

"What I am saying in respect of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan, the Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia, is the position. We are not there to attack Kuwait or Iraq. We are there to defend Saudi Arabia and to ensure that the United Nations embargo is effectively implemented."—[*Official Report*, 7 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 842.]

That is why we are there, and that must be borne in mind when we are discussing the whole question of what military action will be taken. As far as I know, that is still the position: we are there to defend Saudi Arabia, and to ensure that the United Nations shipping and air embargo and the sanctions are implemented.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): If the Arab League forms some kind of unit in the Kuwait area following the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein, what reassurance can my right hon. Friend give the Israelis that it will not then turn on Israel and try to destroy it utterly?

Mr. Heath: That must be part of the general arrangement, described by both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Gorton, for dealing with middle eastern questions as a whole. I was pleased to note that, during my discussions in Baghdad, President Saddam Hussein made no direct link between dealing with the Kuwait problem and dealing with Israel and the middle eastern problem. He said, "Of course I want the middle eastern problem as a whole dealt with, and also the Israeli and Palestinian problem"; but he did not say that any arrangement concerning Kuwait must be linked with the middle east.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that—as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said—the matter must be pursued. It is impossible to go anywhere in the world today without being told that double standards operate. For instance, nothing has been done about resolution 232, concerning Israel, for the past 30 years. However, we are trying to take action in regard to Kuwait in this instance. No one can deny that that is the position.

The official explanation is that the cold war was going on. I do not believe that that is the real reason—or, at any rate, I do not consider it a justifiable excuse. But it would be ironic if, the cold war having ceased, we then embarked on what could be the most damaging war in history, with the use of chemical and biological weapons and the blowing up of oil wells, which would create the biggest fire in history and damage the whole economy of the western world.

The public should be told the consequences of going to war. That might increase our determination to use means of regaining Kuwait by peaceful methods. The public should be told, remembering that the public in the United States are being told infinitely more than is being said in Britain. They have special correspondents and military spokesmen, and the discussion in the congressional committees is making clear exactly what would be involved in a war. The possible casualty figures have been given openly and full statements have been made about what might happen to oil and the economies of the world. So I hope that the public in Britain will be made aware of what the costs of such a war would be.

From the point of view of securing a settlement, the differences between Kuwait and Iraq must be resolved. That makes it difficult to say that there cannot possibly be any alteration affecting land from the point of view of Iraq and Kuwait because of the question of boundaries. President Saddam asked me, "To which boundary are you insisting I return?" I replied, "I cannot say. If you ask for my personal view, it is the boundary that was settled in 1961-62."

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): It is in the resolution.

Mr. Heath: I know, so the question leads us to consider what the boundary was before all this happened. It is alleged that during the eight years of war with Iran the Kuwaitis advanced 60 to 80 km beyond the boundary settled by the British when we moved out in 1961. I do not know whether that is right or wrong, but it is, at any rate, a matter for argument and discussion, and somebody should be doing that. Nobody is at present, and it is not enough merely to say that there can be no change of land.

If the Kuwaitis agreed that the two islands should go to Iraq, would we say that we could not allow that to happen? Of course we would not. So every time we insist that there can be no possible change in land, we are going against item 3—that is, if it were agreed between Kuwait and Iraq.

Similarly, the Arab League could get to work on that. Many of us know that the Arab League is already working on it, although there is criticism in that respect. The question is asked, "Why are the Arabs interfering with what we are doing?" The real answer is that the only lasting settlement of the dispute must come from the Arabs themselves. If we, the Americans and British in particular, try to impose a settlement, it will always be questioned, as the boundaries of the past have been questioned. We should welcome the fact that the Arabs are themselves taking an ever greater interest, even though they have been opposed to Iraq because of its invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that part of the difficulty is the confusion which equates dialogue with appeasement, when dialogue and appeasement are very different matters?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I am afraid that "appeasement" is used as a weapon against those who want to have what the hon. Gentleman calls dialogue, simply to whip up public feeling. Most of those who use it were not even alive in the 1930s, when it happened, and have never studied what the problems of appeasement were. Those of us who opposed it are aware of it very well——

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): Including me.

Mr. Heath: I give full credit to the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) because we were both in the same place at the same time opposing it.

We reach the point at which the issues must be thrashed out, and I hope that when Mr. Baker goes to Baghdad and the silly arguments about dates are all settled, he will not simply say, "Saddam, get out". If he does, President Saddam will reply, "Will you kindly leave Baghdad?" There must be discussion—if one does not like to use the word "negotiation"—and he can discuss what are the outstanding problems with Kuwait.

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Heath: I am doing my best to be brief.

Mr. Hurd: I am listening to my right hon. Friend with great care. Regarding his point about the United Nations, Secretary-General Mr. Perez de Cuellar went to Amman, met Tariq Aziz and made an attempt, in the exercise of his duty, which was rebuffed. He has since explained to me and others that he would have great difficulty going again, in pursuit of Security Council resolutions, if he were to receive a similar rebuff.

As for the Arabs, my right hon. Friend will have noticed what the Kuwaitis and Saudis have said in the past few days in response to the sort of reports to which my right hon. Friend is referring and with which I dealt. They are not interested—how could they be—in settling for less than the Security Council requirements. They would regard doing so as entirely wrong.

I do not want to lengthen my intervention unnecessarily, but my right hon. Friend said near the beginning of his remarks that President Hussein had told him that he feared that, whatever he did, he would be

attacked, even if he pulled back. I hope my right hon. Friend will have noticed what the United States Administration, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have said. The message is a double one: if he does not fully comply, he will be forced out, and if he does fully comply, he will not be attacked.

Mr. Heath: I realise that, but I also realise that if I were in Baghdad in his position I would want some assurances. Having seen what has been happening recently, with half a million troops there and with the British pouring in more, I would want a solid assurance that the Americans, having got all those men and all that equipment there and with President Bush wanting to know what to do with them, would not move into Kuwait. Questions remain to be answered. For example, suppose the emir of Kuwait said, "I want all the Americans and British." What undertaking would President Bush and the Prime Minister be prepared to give? Those are all matters that could be discussed, but the essential ingredient of discussion is lacking.

It is said that the UN Secretary-General has great difficulty going to Baghdad. I do not understand his difficulty. If one is working for peace, one keeps on working for peace, and the United Nations was set up to secure peace. So I do not see why the Secretary-General should have any difficulty in that respect. I see the Foreign Secretary sighing as I say that. I remember his sighing many years ago. He sighed in Paris over our entry into Europe, and he was wrong about that.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend has a great deal of wisdom and knowledge about the region. Some with less wisdom and knowledge seem rather more gung-ho about the military option. What, in his opinion, would be the reaction of the Israeli defence forces if a war were to start, and what implications does he think that would have for the long-term stability of the region and for British interests there?

Mr. Heath: I can give only a personal opinion. If war occurred, the Israelis would be in overnight. One question about a war is this: if the British, Americans and Israelis use atomic weapons when they find how difficult it is, we shall have chemical and biological weapons thrown from Iraq, and it will go on piling up—*[Interruption.]* That is openly discussed in military circles, and it should be discussed here. We should be told just what are the assurances.

On the question of discussions, I have a comment to make that I have made in public but not in the House. I make it because it is of enormous importance in view of attitudes that are struck in some parts of the alliance, to use that phrase, or at United Nations gatherings. I have been recalling what happened over the Cuban missile crisis, the second Cuban crisis. Having in recent weeks had an opportunity of going over the whole scene again with Robert McNamara, who was the American Defence Secretary under President Kennedy, I have concluded that the comparisons are very striking, as are the differences.

Khrushchev was determined to get nuclear weapons into Cuba. That became known. Kennedy was determined to prevent that from happening. Throughout the crisis Kennedy was in contact with Moscow. We still have full diplomatic relations, as have all other countries, with Baghdad. I want to know what is happening between ambassadors and what exchanges are taking place between them.

Kennedy was constantly in contact with Khrushchev, and warning him. Finally, he said, "I am going to surround Cuba with my warships and it will be cut off. If your ships bringing in nuclear weapons try to break through, we shall fire across their bows and if they persist we shall sink them." Khrushchev said, "Why am I being prevented from sending nuclear weapons to Cuba? You say it is because they are a danger to you, but your nuclear weapons in Turkey are a danger to me and they are just as close, so why are you taking this attitude?" To that Kennedy replied, "Very well, I am not going to do a deal". He was quite clear about that. He said, "You cannot bring nuclear weapons into Cuba, but you can keep ordinary forces there." They are still there and have been since that day. The only person who did not know about them was President Carter because nobody ever told him. That was why he got his wires crossed with Brezhnev, who was very surprised, which upset the period up to 1980.

Mr. Healey: The right hon. Gentleman will also be aware that, without making it part of the deal, President Kennedy took American nuclear weapons out of Turkey.

Mr. Heath: I was just coming to that. President Kennedy said, "I am not going to do a deal, but I will tell you confidentially that the nuclear weapons we have in Turkey are out of date, so I am removing them." The American Secretary of Defence moved them from Turkey to Italy, summoned every television group and cameraman he could find and had the nuclear weapons openly destroyed. He said, "There you are—we brought them away only to destroy them." The result was that when the ships were coming up to Cuba there was a terrible moment of anxiety while everyone was sitting round the table in the White House with nothing more to say or do, just waiting. Then the ships turned about and went back and the nuclear weapons were never delivered.

I do not know how the Foreign Secretary would describe that. Is that appeasement? Is it a deal? Is it unjustified discussion and negotiations, or what? The plain fact is that it stopped a third world war. Surely we can use our imagination in the same way as Kennedy did. I do not want the Foreign Secretary to negotiate; I just want him to indicate. I want President Bush to say, "I shall do such and such." That is how we shall solve the crisis. I wish the Secretary of State for Defence would not look quite so puzzled—I can go over again all the details for the whole operation with him. The essential thing is not to get into a position of rigidity, but to realise that finding a peaceful solution, although not easy, is possible and the price of not finding one is immensely high and could be unsustainable.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I do not think that many people in the House, if any, are against the concept of talking, but does my right hon. Friend agree that there would be no prospect of discussions with Iraq if the allies had not shown themselves willing to use military force in the last resort? I suspect that the hostages would not have been released if the allies had not shown themselves willing to resort to military force. It is a sad paradox, but I believe that we have done the right thing.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but he should recall the quotation I gave from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who said that we were there to defend Saudi Arabia, which is quite right.

Mr. Tom King: On 6 September.

Mr. Heath: Yes. President Saddam Hussein saw that, and for that reason he would not attack Saudi Arabia. There may be differences of opinion as to whether he would have done so in any case—that is a different discussion. Of course, I agree entirely that having the force there prevented him from attacking Saudi Arabia. As for the hostages, Saddam Hussein has realised—some of us tried to press him as hard as we could about it—that keeping them served no purpose.

I said to Saddam Hussein, "I must tell you frankly that the British Prime Minister"—the then Prime Minister—"will not be deterred from bombing your strategic points because you have got British there—not in the least. President Bush will not be deterred either." Therefore, all that Saddam Hussein is doing is denying the United Nations one of its points and it serves no useful purpose to Iraq or anyone else. I am glad that that message has gone home, he has accepted it and all the hostages are coming back here.

I was glad for the way in which the Foreign Secretary welcomed that move and I hope that we can now concentrate on paragraph 3, which has been so ignored by President Bush and those who are taking the lead. We must work hard to find a peaceful solution. I do not believe that it is impossible.

5.16 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am very glad to follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). I am sure that the House and the country will have listened with great care to what he said. When he went on his visit to Baghdad he was strongly criticised in some quarters, but I think that it was a most courageous action on his part; he helped to break the deadlock surrounding the hostages and showed how we might approach other matters. The right hon. Gentleman emphasised the desirability of pursuing diplomacy while other United Nations actions continue, with which I also agree. However, I must emphasise that there are some matters on which I disagree with him profoundly.

Since the crisis broke, there have been two most serious perils or precipices from which the world might fall. The first was the precipice of allowing the aggression to succeed or be tolerated, and for all the protests of the United Nations to rank with those protests made against Hitler's invasions in the 1930s. We in the Labour party took the strong view that we must not permit that; we have a strong tradition of supporting the United Nations. The leader of my party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) have strongly sustained that tradition throughout, which has been essential to try to prevent a dangerous situation from becoming more dangerous.

It would be absurd for anyone to suppose that the second peril did not exist. It involved what might happen if we were plunged into war. Some of my hon. Friends, and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup a moment ago, have emphasised those dangers. They were right to do so because in such a crisis it is right to spell out the appalling and horrific possibilities ahead of us.

In a sense, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup is correct in saying that in some respects the alternative and the dangers involved have been more fully spelt out in the United States than in this country. It is right that we should take note of them. Perhaps the most forthright and all-encompassing statement on the subject was made by Mr. Brzezinski who, according to previous estimates on such matters, is certainly not a wet. He said:

> "A war is likely to split the international consensus that currently exists, the United States is likely to become estranged from many of its European allies, and it is almost certain to become the object of widespread Arab hostility. Indeed, once started, the war may prove not all that easy to terminate, given the inflammable character of Middle Eastern politics. It could be costly in blood and financially devastating.
>
> This prospect is all the more tragic because the United States would thereby be deprived of the fruits of its hard-earned victory in the Cold War."

Mr. Brzezinski continued that the region would be "profoundly disturbed" by war. He said:

> "I fear that if we overplay our hand, it is we who will lose the flexibility."

He added that

> "to speak of Saddam Hussein as a Hitler is to trivialise Hitler and to elevate Saddam."

The House, the country and the world should take note of that warning. The evidence so far is that the countries in the Security Council have taken the warning seriously, and I hope that they will continue to do so. A few wild voices were raised at the beginning of the crisis urging a sudden strike against Iraq to settle the issue, but all those voices have been stilled and the action was not taken. The Government can claim some credit for that. The full weight of the opinion of this House was thrown against any such development. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton stressed again today, we have thrown the weight of our party, our country and the House against that alternative.

So far, then, we have fallen over neither precipice. Now we must consider carefully how to proceed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred to previous cases of the United Nations' failure to carry out its resolutions. He suggested that such failures in the middle east or in Cyprus mean that we have no authority or effective power to invoke the United Nations to settle this question——

Mr. Benn *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Foot: That, at any rate, was how I construed his intervention. I am glad if he does not take that view, which would strengthen the arguments against the authority of the United Nations.

The Labour party has no need to be apologetic about these matters. On several occasions, Conservative Governments have refused to support the United Nations charter; indeed, they have acted in flagrant defiance of the charter, as they did in 1956. I do not say that our record is spotless, but it is a good deal better than that of Conservative Governments. We have done our best to try to sustain the charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Benn: Will my right hon. Friend clarify whether he believes that UN resolution 678 would authorise the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq, under the phrase "all other

means"? The Commander-in-Chief of the American forces has said that nuclear weapons might be used in some circumstances. Would my right hon. Friend support that?

Mr. Foot: Certainly not. The resolution does not mean that—it refers to all appropriate means. I shall come later to how the danger of nuclear weapons being used in the middle east might be averted. That will involve upholding the authority of the United Nations, not casting it away.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield and others have suggested that the United Nations lacks the moral authority to apply its doctrines because of our failure to apply the resolutions to the middle east. That is a gospel of despair. The argument should be put the other way around. If we can succeed in making the authority of the United Nations effective in this crisis, the chances of its being effective later in other areas are enormously improved.

It is sometimes said that only in recent weeks has there been unity between the Soviet Union, the other great powers and ourselves on these matters, but when resolution 242, on the occupied territories, was passed in 1967—I had some interest in the matter because my brother moved the resolution—the United States, the Soviet Union and the Israeli Government of the time backed it, and many Arab Governments have gradually come around to supporting it too. If we can achieve a successful and peaceful outcome to the Kuwait dispute, the chances of reapplying that resolution soon afterwards will be greatly enhanced, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton has said several times.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield mentioned Cyprus, as he has every right to do. Many people there have complained strongly, asking what right we have to take action in Kuwait if we do not take note of the resolutions passed for their defence, but the same Cyprus Government who have asked that question support the stance of the Labour party on the Gulf because they have vision and sense enough to know that if we can obtain a settlement of the Kuwait dispute on the proper basis of decisions taken under the United Nations charter the chances of returning to deal with the Cyprus dispute will be greatly enhanced.

A little while ago, before this crisis arose, many people thought that the world might have a better chance in the 1990s. That chance still prevails, but the essential requirement for its success is that United Nations authority be established and sustained. I agree entirely with all who say that such cases must be carefully considered, but in some circumstances this means carrying out only one part of the charter—not only by applying sanctions, but by giving the United Nations military support under the charter.

I am almost the only hon. Member who was here when the charter was voted upon in the Parliament of 1945. I went to San Francisco as a journalist and saw what happened, and I was proud that the Labour party that I supported, and its leader Clem Attlee, played a foremost part in shaping that charter and learning from the experience of the 1930s.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield has been wrongly accused of being guilty of some Hoare-Laval plan. That was plainly false, but there was such a thing as that plan. It was a breach of the elementary system of collective security that we then had. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) fought a Conservative candidate in Oxford at the time, who I gather still exists in the shape of Lord Hailsham, who has an ambivalent view on these matters. Faced with the breach of international law involved in the raid on Libya, Lord Hailsham was the sole person in the universe to say that the action was in accordance with international law. I think that he was recalling his old appeasement days when he said that.

The whole thrust of the post-war period has, in any case, been to build a more collective and effective United Nations which would seek always to use sanctions. We must still use them and we have every possibility of succeeding thereby. The chances of their proving effective in this case are more hopeful than ever before. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East has said in past debates, we should persist in applying sanctions, which are much more effective than resorting to war. The influence of this House and of speeches such as that by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup can be used in that direction whenever there are dangers of people thinking in other terms.

The prize is very great. There have been differing accounts of how people have fared in conversations with Saddam Hussein. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup gave his account and no doubt my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield will give his. As a long-standing socialist, I was proud to see that it looks as though the interview that had the best effect on President Hussein was the one with Willy Brandt. The account of that interview was given in *The Observer* on Sunday. It states:

> "Brandt told him: 'Your survival, Mr. President, and the survival of your country depend on genuine concessions not linked to a deal with the West or anyone else.'
>
> He added: 'All you can still hope for is a gradual change in Western public opinion, but you will achieve that only by releasing all hostages and withdrawing unconditionally from Kuwait. Time is not on your side in spite of President Bush's internal problems'."

Then the report describes the Iraqi president's reaction to the way in which Willy Brandt had stated the case. I am sure that Willy Brandt would not claim that it was only his conversation which had an effect but that it was also the background of events. At the same time as the apparatus, the panoply and the power of the United Nations are mobilised, it is important to mobilise intelligent methods of diplomacy. That underlines what was said by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. Obviously, it was intelligent of Willy Brandt to go to Baghdad and speak in those terms.

In the 1990s, the United Nations can come into its own more than ever before. We owe a vote of thanks to Willy Brandt, who has played a bigger part than anyone else in securing the unification of Germany and peaceful developments. At the same time as we propose the strengthening of the United Nations charter, we should invite Germany to take its proper place as a member of the Security Council. It could play an important part.

Mr. Walden: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foot: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman because I am coming to the end of my speech.

As my hon. Friends have said, the possibilities are enormous. I know how passionately and strongly my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield feels on this, and he has stated his case with his usual skill and determination. However, a vote against the Government's

[Mr. Foot]

policies would be a vote not against the Government but against the United Nations policies on these matters, and such a vote could damage the cause of making the United Nations charter work peacefully and successfully in solving this dispute.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I remind the House that nearly 40 right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I ask for brief speeches.

5.32 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) robustly defended the importance of standing up for collective security. He rightly praised Mr. Brandt's initiative and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) in visiting Baghdad. I do not wish to criticise either of those statesmen for doing so.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup called for dialogue, but my impression is that dialogue is going on all the time. The Iraqi Foreign Minister goes to the Gulf, Oman and Yemen and there are visits to Algiers. What could be more in the way of dialogue than President Bush's invitation to Tariq Aziz and of Mr. Baker's proposed visit to Baghdad? We are not avoiding dialogue. So far we have avoided negotiations, but there are many opportunities for people to talk, and they are doing so.

In this last debate on the matter before the recess, it is important to weigh up the realities. The Arabian peninsula has the biggest deployment of military force ever seen in thousands of years. Some 500,000 Iraqis are dug in in and around Kuwait. The Iraqi army was not much good in its offensives against Iran, and those who start a war should get to first base. The Iraqi army never did that. However, it is good at defence. With the late Member for Inverness—Colonel Maclean—I went to look at the Iraqi army about five years ago and was impressed by its morale and capability.

Opposed to that army is an alliance of 500,000 men led by the United States, and that includes the flower of the American army, the legendary airborne divisions, the marine corps, I think five naval aircraft carrier battle groups and an armada of the most modern aircraft, including the stealth aircraft. The resolution of this juxtaposition hangs on the question which way will it fall? Will it fall to war or to a withdrawal of Saddam Hussein? I doubt whether there is a middle way.

The consequences of a war are totally unpredictable but are bound to be tragic. It may lead to the break-up of Iraq from which some would gain advantage, but that would be a big step in the development of the middle east. If Saddam Hussein withdraws, he will be left intact. Could we live with that? I suppose we could because we lived with the Soviet Union in eastern Europe for 40 years and no doubt we could contain Saddam Hussein if we had to.

We must draw one clear conclusion from the situation. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has no doubt effectively undertaken its duty of guarding the holy places of Islam. However, neither King Fahd nor the other rulers in the peninisula are remotely capable of defending its oil resources.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that oil is only one of the factors with which we are concerned. That is correct, but it is an important factor, not in terms of company profits or anything like that but because the whole industrial world depends on the free flow of oil. In addition, some of the biggest sufferers from the present sanctions policy are third world countries which need oil at a reasonable price. This treasure house for Japan, Europe, the United States and the third world must be defended. That means that its security must be underpinned by forces from outside the area. There will have to be, as there presently are in the peninsula, naval and air forces, stockpiles of weapons and ground forces to protect the installations. Who will do that? The United States has given the lead and we must earnestly encourage it to continue to defend the area, whether it be by mopping up the consequences of war or by containing Saddam Hussein if he withdraws intact.

I also argue that it is the duty of Europe to help the United States. I was glad to hear what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday in Berlin about the Western European Union. Our German friends must be persuaded that they have a duty as the leading power in Europe to contribute to the collective security of what is as much in Germany's interests as in those of America and Britain. The same is true of the Japanese, who must be persuaded in due course to weigh in in one way or another.

What will be the local response to my proposals? This is an area of great sensitivity. I suppose that the patriarch Abraham was born in what is now Kuwait—so he would have been a Kuwaiti if he had lived in the modern world. The great Muslim religion also originated in what is now Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are proud people, but I think that they have learnt from the experience of Kuwait. They recognise that they were better off when they were protected by a system such as the one that they had in the past. They cannot effectively protect themselves.

That lesson has been learnt not only by the Government but by the people. After all, the people there enjoy the highest standard of living of, I suppose, any area in the world. No taxation, welfare, housing—everything is given to them. All the menial and technical, difficult jobs are done by expatriates. Therefore, I do not think that we have a problem with regard to public opinion locally.

The area is almost uninhabited. If one adds up the populations of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, it is difficult to find 1 million men of fighting age in the whole assembly. All the facilities required for some sort of middle eastern defence organisation are there, already created by the oil companies—harbours, oilfields and the means of communication.

There may be some resentment among other Arabs not in the peninsula. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup talked about an Arab solution. We should be a bit careful about that. An Arab solution has always been to some extent an attempt by the poor Arabs to take over the wealth of the rich Arabs, and that is not necessarily in the interests of the industrial world, or the third world outside the middle east.

There has been talk of an international conference, and the whole problem of the Palestinian issue has naturally arisen again. But nobody can imagine for a moment that when President Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait he was doing so in the interests of the Palestinian people. That

would be stretching it a little too far. But if there is to be an international conference, it is essential that there should be an element of stability in the middle east to guarantee any agreements that are reached.

Therefore, I come back to what I said a moment or two ago. We will need to have a middle eastern defence organisation, its command and control to be left to negotiation, in which the leaders of the peninsula will be underpinned and supported certainly by western Europe and the United States and, I hope, in the longer run, by Japan.

I do not believe that any agreement will be reached between the Palestinians and the Israelis unless there is a United States presence in the middle east to guarantee and to uphold any agreement that is reached. Otherwise, these things will either not occur, or, if they do occur, will disintegrate.

I do not believe that the French and the Germans would have been reconciled if we had not had NATO. It was under the umbrella of the American presence that the French went back on their Assembly's decision to oppose German rearmament. They then came to terms and became friends with their erstwhile German opponents. The same will be true of the Israelis. If they are to reach agreement, they will have to make concessions and they will not make concessions unless the agreements can be guaranteed by their longstanding friends, the United States.

But there is perhaps a wider significance in the idea of a middle eastern defence organisation. There has been a lot of talk about a new order. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent have also spoken about it. But there will be other crises. Kuwait will not be the only one.

The social and economic turmoil in Africa and elsewhere in Asia is likely to lead to other military confrontations, perhaps not as serious as this one, perhaps ultimately more serious. Any economic solution that we may devise may need some military backing. The World bank report on Africa seems to point in the same direction.

With the erosion of the threat of Soviet imperialism, it will become more difficult for the United States, in the eyes of its domestic public opinion and locally, to maintain the forces that it maintains today on the continent of Europe around Japan. Some redistribution will be necessary, but geopolitically the Arabian peninsula would seem to be the most suitable and valuable place on which to base a strategic reserve for the new order that we hope will come to be.

There is, of course, great and natural anxiety about the consequences of the breakdown of the GATT talks and the industrial world breaking into three major blocs. There is a risk and a danger of that, but strong forces are also working the other way. The multinational companies will want to bring the three blocs together and oil is the cement which makes it difficult for them to separate.

We in the House are right to see the dangers of the situation in which we live, but I urge right hon. and hon. Members not to lose sight of the opportunities. If anyone had said six months ago, looking at the difficult situation in the middle east, that 500,000 American troops would be sitting there, he would not have been believed. Well, they are there now. How do we make use of them? How do we guide them? How do we work with the Americans to try to bring about solutions not only of the local problems of the middle east but of the wider problems outside?

5.45 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): With other hon. Members, I recently visited the United Kingdom forces in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in accordance with the arrangements made for us by the Ministry of Defence. I was struck by two things. The first was the extraordinary maturity and professionalism of the young men and women of all three services. I came back confirmed in the belief that they should not be exploited and that they should not lightly be exposed to the risk of injury or death that the military option would necessarily involve. I was also struck by the sense of responsibility of senior officers, who seemed to display a realistic awareness of the difficulties of a military solution and of the potentially fearful consequences.

Last week Brigadier Cordingley appeared to have caused some disquiet by the candour that he displayed when talking about the potential for casualties. I do not share the view that he should be the subject of criticism or concern. It is right that we should all understand the magnitude of the military task and the potential consequences if the military option falls to be exercised.

If the military option was to be credible when troops were first deployed, it had to be of such a nature as to put pressure on Saddam Hussein. That continues to be my judgment of the best way in which to proceed, but the events of the past few days cannot be ignored. The United States has agreed to face-to-face talks and has accepted the possibility of a middle east peace conference. In those circumstances, it is idle to pretend that the political climate has not changed. I remain of the view that the military option must be kept credible, because anything which detracts from that credibility may suggest a weakness of resolve that Saddam Hussein would be quick to exploit; but the maintenance of a credible military option is not an alternative to a peaceful solution—it is a necessary component of it. Only the knowledge that the military option is available and may be used as a last resort is likely to compel Saddam Hussein to take seriously any measures which are designed to achieve a peaceful solution. To tell him that the military option was no longer realistically available would be to encourage him to procrastinate.

So long as there is a reasonable prospect of a peaceful solution, the military option should not be used. I do not mean a remote or speculative prospect of a peaceful solution, but a realistic one. Resolution 678, which includes the deadline to which reference has already been made, is permissive, not mandatory. The date of 15 January should not be seen as heralding hostilities, but as permitting them if no peaceful solution involving the implementation of all the United Nations resolutions can be achieved. Efforts at peaceful negotiation should continue up to 15 January and beyond, provided that there are reasonable prospects of success. That must necessarily be a matter of judgment, day by day.

The release of the hostages and the United States' change of attitude have enhanced the prospects for successful negotiations, but it must be made clear in those negotiations that a solution cannot be bought at the expense of the territory of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein must be under no illusions. The United Nations resolutions must be implemented fully—and that means the evacuation of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and the restoration of that country's Government. Once it becomes clear that a full-scale withdrawal is under way,

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

Kuwait's legitimate Government can enter into negotiations with Iraq if they choose—indeed, the United Nations resolutions expressly encourage that—but that must be for Kuwait, albeit with assistance and encouragement. Our task is to ensure that the United Nations' resolutions are fully implemented. Anything less would be seen as a reward for Saddam Hussein's aggression and would undoubtedly diminish the United Nations' new-found authority.

The international community's initial disapproval was marked by the imposition of sanctions. There have been some reports from Baghdad, mainly anecdotal, about their effectiveness. It is essential that we have much more analytical evidence as to whether sanctions are having any effect and, if so, how deeply they are biting and how long it will be until they cause such serious disruption as might influence Baghdad to change its policy. If we are to understand the effectiveness of those sanctions, we need more than the anecdotal evidence which is all that we have had so far. Detailed economic analysis of the consequences of the sanctions ought to be easily available.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Finnish ambassador to the Security Council, speaking as chair of the sanctions committee, informed me in the course of a discussion two and a half weeks ago in New York that sanctions were working and proving an effective weapon against Saddam Hussein. It is clear, however, that those sanctions will take time to cripple Iraq.

Mr. Campbell: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but he may agree that he has provided only anecdotal evidence about the extent to which sanctions have been effective. One is entitled to seek clear evidence. Any decision about the use of the military option should be made only in the light of the best possible information available. If the information was that within a matter of weeks the sanctions would prove so effective as to bring down Saddam Hussein or create circumstances in which his policy would necessarily require modification, that would be a compelling argument against exercising the military option. The decision to use the military option must be taken against the fullest possible information—and that, so far, is not available to us.

Our actions in the next few weeks will have as much to do with the long term as with the short term. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was, in his usual courteous way, sceptical of my suggestion in the House on the eve of his departure to the United Nations, to the effect that we should address the long term now, and that long-term peace initiatives ought to be under consideration. Since then, there has been a change of heart by the United States, and I hope that that will persuade the right hon. Gentleman, if not entirely to dissipate his scepticism, then at least to dilute it to some extent. I hope, too, that he will respond favourably to the notion that we should consider the long-term prospects in parallel with, and not separately or distinct from, the short term.

It is essential to ensure that a long-term initiative for peace in the middle east is seen not as a prize won forcibly by Iraqi aggression. As the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, Saddam Hussein did not have the interests of the Palestinians at heart when he invaded Kuwait—nor, I imagine, do the Kuwaitis think that the price that they had to pay was the legitimate price of bringing long-term stability to the middle east. Iraqi aggression in Kuwait was entirely self-serving. A long-term initiative should be presented as recognition of the continuing anxiety of Arab states, which see the Palestinian problem as a continuing cause of instability, and of the contribution that they made to the United Nations' forces. The long-term initiative for peace in the middle east should be seen as an achievement of collective Arab opinion, not as a reward for Iraqi expansionism.

Any such initiative will necessarily require Israel's involvement. If that is given willingly, well and good—but if not, the United States, which is in a stronger position to persuade Israel than any other country, may have to bear that burden. That may have consequences for domestic United States politics, but Israel's participation would be of such significance and importance that if it were unwilling to participate America might find itself called upon to exercise the necessary degree of persuasion.

In the long term, we shall require a security system in the middle east which does not emasculate Iraq but neutralises it. If the United Nations resolutions are implemented, I do not believe that Saddam Hussein would voluntarily surrender his chemical and biological weapons, and the possibility of owning nuclear weapons. If the resolutions are implemented, we know that there will be no majority for military action among those who have gone to the middle east under the auspices of the United Nations. Instead, resort must be made to political means, and one questions what they would be. Answering that will be for all the nations of the middle east, and in particular for the United Kingdom and the United States, who have a presence in the region as a consequence of United Nations resolutions. How we answer that question and create a security system which neutralises the effect of a heavily armed Iraq with more than a million men under arms will be a test for the United Nations, for the United States and almost certainly for all the right hon. and hon. Members of this House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that earlier Mr. Speaker imposed a limit, and that speeches between now and 8 o'clock should not exceed 10 minutes.

Dr. Godman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you extend that limit to 9 o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The limits are set out clearly in the Standing Order. Mr. Speaker has used his powers to their full extent.

5.59 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): This debate takes place against the background of the unexpected—to most of us—release of hostages held in Iraq. Our thoughts go out to them and to their families tonight as they begin to return to this country. Above all, our thoughts are with those people who have been hiding in Kuwait for the past four months, and also those who have been held in so-called target areas. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that they will need all the help and support that they can get. Unless one has lived in such conditions for a long time, one cannot understand their effects.

I can look back over many years of service in the Army. The period that I remember most clearly was that sad and unhappy time in 1956 when Nasser nationalised the Suez canal. By good chance, or misfortune, I was away from the middle east, attending a course in England at the time. I came to the House and sat in the Strangers' Gallery to listen to all the wise words. I went back to my battalion in Cyprus heartened, because I heard speech after speech in the opening debate making it clear that aggression must be countered and that we could not allow it to stand.

I remember only too well the eve of the landings in Port Said. I commanded a parachute company. We were awaiting the order to move in. As always, the overseas service of the BBC was excellent, and I listened to some of the final debates in the House on the crisis. Those of us at the sharp end did not know whether we were coming or going. Many of us wished that, instead of going, we were returning to Cyprus and playing no part in that confused operation whatsoever.

I strongly disapproved of the operation at Port Said and, as a result, I left the Army, having spent 13 happy years there from the age of 16 to 29. I would not be here to make this speech if I had remained in the Army; I should be retired and probably sitting quite happily in Dorset.

Frankly, we can all be ashamed of what happened in the aftermath of Suez. Perhaps we would not be talking about Iraq today if it had not been for Suez, with Nurisaid and the king being dragged through the streets and murdered, the riots in Jordan, and all the other repercussions. No one can tell what may happen in the aftermath of an operation like Suez, or, for that matter, Kuwait.

The same applies today, but, throughout the present crisis, the unanimity between the Opposition Front Bench and the Government has been heartening. That is the best thing. However, I am slightly worried that when the Opposition Front Bench spokesman talked of how long we should carry on with sanctions there was a suggestion that it could be open-ended, which perhaps left a way out, if it should be required by the Opposition. I hope that it will not materialise.

We are delighted that our people are coming home, but what of the Kuwaitis left behind? So far, too few hon. Members have taken the Kuwaitis into account. Day after day I have watched the Kuwaiti ambassador sitting in the Strangers' Gallery, listening to our debates. My heart goes out to him, and to the 100,000 Kuwaitis who have been dispossessed, killed, and thrown to one side, the intention being to destroy their country. I find it unbelievable that we can debate this issue so coolly, and talk about waiting three months, six months, nine months or another year. Sheikh Ali al-Khalifa al Sabah, the Minister of Finance, came to our Conservative party conference in Bournemouth. He told us that they could not wait 40 years, 40 months or 40 days. In the 40 days which have passed since then, even more horrifying action has been taken in Kuwait by the Iraqis.

I have not had any recent meetings with Saddam Hussein—although I spent two and a half hours with him about three and a half years ago—so I am not well versed. However, I did not take kindly to him, and I did not think that he was a very nice chap. Other hon. Members may have found him more amenable—I am a fairly junior personage. Certainly at the height of the last Basra offensive he was tough, determined, knew exactly where he was going, and would not take advice from anyone.

I could pretend to have some military knowledge and could give my estimates of casualties and other battle figures, but I shall not do so. I shall end my speech by quoting the words of the Bishop of Oxford last Friday morning on "Thought for Today". If we listen to the words of a man of God, speaking about the problem that he, the Church and indeed all of us face, we might learn a little. He said that:

"The human response to the announcement"—

that all hostages, guests and those in hiding are free—

"is natural and straightforward. The political response is, alas, more complex. If hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, then Saddam Hussein's hypocrisy can be welcomed. But of course it is a calculated move. Public support for a war in the United States has shown signs of waning. This action, like the T.V. appearance of Saddam Hussein with children, is designed to convey the message that he is really quite a nice guy. If the hostages are all back safely and Hussein's really not too bad, why bother about someone else's country a long way away, especially when it means risking horrendous casualties? This is the mood which he will count on—one which will allow him to retain Kuwait. So it is important to keep the international resolve firm that he must withdraw.

In recent years the churches have, understandably, put peace high on their agenda. But peace is inseparable from justice, of which it is the fruit. The role of the churches is not simply to work and pray for peace but for just order. Naked aggression must not be allowed to pay; the brutal annexation of one country by another must be rectified. The integrity of national boundaries is to be respected and upholding the rule of international law is important for the whole world . . . There are dangers in being specific. Nevertheless, on this issue I want to pray not only for peace but for the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, and continued determination in the international community to see this happen".

I think that those words would be echoed by 95 per cent. of hon. Members, and I pray to God that it comes about and that this evil man will withdraw.

6.8 pm

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I hope that one consequence of this debate will be that we shall have no more nonsense from the Opposition Front Bench about hon. Members who argue for caution in dealing with this issue being appeasers. It is striking that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot)—I hope that I can include myself—fought hard against appeasement by the Tory Government in 1938, so we know what we are talking about. Also, we have all, except I think my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent, served in the forces, and we know what is involved in a war.

Of course, we cannot rule out the use of force if Saddam Hussein fails to leave Kuwait, but the resolution just passed by the United Nations does not commit us to use force immediately the deadline is passed on 15 January, nor does it commit us to use force. It commits us to use "all necessary means . . . to restore . . . peace and security" to the middle east. I shall return to those words in a moment.

What concerns many of us here and in the United States is that President Bush, by his words and deeds, is making it more difficult to use the necessary means that will restore peace and stability to the middle east. He is threatening to commit us all to a course that will destroy the possibility of peace and stability for at least a generation. I am disturbed by attempts by the Pentagon to misrepresent the value of sanctions, as it did in Secretary Cheney's evidence to Congress the other day. In answer to the hon. and

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learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), we have had a detailed account of the efficacy of sanctions from the head of the CIA when he gave evidence to Congress. He estimated that

"Iraq is now deprived of more than 90 per cent. of the goods and services it needs, and that by next spring only some energy-related and military industries will still be able to operate . . . the equivalent of 43 per cent. of both the Iraqi and Kuwaiti GNPs has effectively already been eroded."

We know that by next summer Iraqi guns, tanks and aircraft will be running out of spares and that they have no money with which to buy more. They may also be running out of fuel.

Mr. James Schlesinger, who has been head of the CIA, Secretary for Energy, and Secretary for Defence in the United States under both Democratic and Republican Administrations, told Congress the other day that when sanctions were first adopted, the American authorities knew that they would take about 12 months to work. Those of us who studied the problem warned the House in the debate in September that it would be a long time before sanctions would work. However, many of us believe that, given time, they will work.

I am disturbed, as I hope are other hon. Members, by the deliberate disinformation about Iraq's nuclear capability that has been spread by the Defence Intelligence Agency, which is a public relations organisation for Mr. Cheney. It suggested that the Iraqis are only a few months away from producing a nuclear weapon and that that was an argument for the early use of force. Even the Israelis, who have the biggest interest in exaggerating the Iraqi capability, admitted that an Iraqi bomb is years away. The International Atomic Energy Agency, which regularly inspects Iraqi facilities and did so only a few weeks ago from 19 to 22 November, said that there was no evidence of a diversion of nuclear materials. A *Financial Times* writer was correct in saying last week that Iraq is no more nuclear capable now than it was 10 years ago.

What worries me most is that the sort of war that the United States is now planning to fight would not contribute to peace and security in the middle east and is not necessary. As the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, they have now put more men there than they had in Germany to confront the Russians at the height of the cold war. To use those forces would mean an economic catastrophe and political instability for many years. Incidentally, in answer to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), it is doubtful whether one building would be left standing in Kuwait after such a war. So let us not have crocodile tears about what happens to the people in Kuwait. The sort of war that the Americans are planning to fight would probably mean the death by bombing of almost every man, woman, child and living thing in Kuwait City at least.

The economic consequences would be oil at $45 a barrel next year and $35 a barrel in 1992. That would be a doomsday scenario. It would mean disaster for eastern Europe and the third world, would tip the United States and much of western Europe into deep recession and would probably produce the collapse of the American banking system.

The political consequences would be no less serious. Iran and Syria would be in the saddle if Iraq was destroyed in the sort of war that America is planning to fight. That is just after the west and the Soviet Union have spent 10 years arming Iraq to prevent precisely that possibility. It would undoubtedly lead to the collapse of the Gulf regimes particularly if, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup suggested, the Israelis came into the war on the Anglo-Saxon side from the word go.

We must give sanctions at least another 12 months to work. That will create difficulties because of what has been done already. The morale of the American troops will be a problem, but it would be possible, as Admiral Crowe and General Jones suggested in Congress—both of them oppose war now—to rotate the forces arriving in January to use with the forces already there.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that we must support peace initiatives from the Arab countries, particularly those under way from Jordan and Algeria. We must start planning now for stability in the Gulf after Saddam Hussein withdraws, and that will include a settlement of the Israeli problem. If Saddam Hussein is to give up his nuclear ambitions, something will have to be done about Israeli nuclear weapons, which are an incentive to the Arab countries to follow suit.

The Gulf will remain unstable however the crisis is resolved, and there is an overwhelming case for reducing the west's dependence on oil from the Gulf. American experts have calculated that if America had maintained the energy-saving programmes that it followed between 1977 and 1985, it would now be totally independent of Gulf oil. If the Americans taxed gasolene to the level at which we tax it here, it would solve their budget problem and encourage the use of smaller cars. If the Americans simply replaced their older cars that now do only 19 miles to the gallon with some that do 29 miles to the gallon, it would have no need of Gulf oil.

To quote a well-known source, there is, in fact, an alternative. However, the alternative requires patience and some lead from Her Majesty's Government. The Foreign Secretary's speech today—as was detected by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup—was significantly different in style and content from speeches that he made on earlier occasions. I am glad that it took only a day or two after the departure of the previous Prime Minister from No. 10 for him to recognise Syria and talk about dropping the Nuremberg elements of the United Nations posture on Iraq. There have also been important changes on Europe and defence. He has now agreed to support the zero option for land-based missiles in Europe and he made an interesting speech yesterday. However, I tried to reconcile that with the rococo variations played by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on the same day. Those of us who study the piano—that includes the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup when he is awake—all know that sometimes the variations bear little resemblance to the original tune.

I believe that if the Government take my advice, they will earn the heartfelt gratitude of our allies, our friends in the United States and the Soviet Union and, above all, the British people.

6.18 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) in expressing my sympathy for the hostages, who have suffered danger and anxiety, and for their relatives. However, I have been worried by some of the criticisms

that have been made by some of the returning hostages about the conduct of our embassies in Kuwait and in Baghdad. Some of those criticisms are based on misunderstanding. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out, the ambassador in Kuwait, Michael Weston, and Mr. Banks, his only colleague there, have been incarcerated in the embassy, so it has not been possible, since the beginning of the problem, for them to get out to help the British hostages in Kuwait. They have not been able to help in providing food, for example, or in the elimination of rats or in improving living conditions.

It has been suggested that our embassy in Baghdad has not given sufficient help in getting the hostages out. The reality is that the British and American hostages have been discriminated against by the Iraqis because Britain and the United States have taken the strongest stand against the Iraqi aggression. We should take careful note of what happens now because the determination and resolve that the British and American Governments have shown in pressing for successive United Nations resolutions and for a firm posture against Saddam Hussein have resulted in the release of all the hostages. If they are released in the next few days, it will mean that our approach has been extremely effective.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Blaker: No; I do not have enough time.

We should pay tribute to the ambassador and his colleague in Kuwait and to the ambassador and his staff in Baghdad.

We should continue to hold open the possibility of war between the coalition and Iraq. I am not calling for war itself. If war comes, it will be because Saddam Hussein has refused to obey the United Nations resolutions. It will also be a result of the need to protect the world's oil supplies and I see nothing wrong in accepting that fact. We are talking not about the profits of the oil companies, but about keeping the wheels of industry and of agriculture moving all over the world. We are talking about providing the necessities of life for the world's people, including the pensioners in my constituency and in all the other constituencies. We are talking about providing the means of life for the Indian peasant and for the African peasant. Protecting the supply of oil for the world is a legitimate purpose for us.

If war comes, it will do so because we have to show that aggression does not pay. It is ironic that, having successfully operated a policy of deterrence in Europe for 40 years, we have failed to operate a policy of deterrence in the middle east. We must now do the next best thing. We must hold open the possibility of war to redress the wrong that Saddam Hussein has done. That does not mean, as has been alleged, that the drums of war are beating on the Conservative Benches, but only that we believe that, without the possibility of war, we shall not oblige Saddam Hussein to surrender to the sanctions of the United Nations. In my experience, it is those who have known war who hate war the most. Let us also be clear that we are not talking about aggression, as some correspondents have alleged when writing to me. We are talking about liberation. The aggression has already taken place, so it is the liberation of Kuwait that is at issue.

If, regrettably, war comes, it will be nasty and it will not necessarily be over in a short time. I do not trust those who say that a quick surgical strike by air will be effective. It is almost certain to be a war of tanks and of infantry, and of occupying ground, which will mean substantial human casualties. It is possible that gas will be used. Another point, which other hon. Members have not mentioned, is that some countries, including Britain, America and some Arab countries, will suffer casualties whereas the Germans and the Japanese, who have at least as much at stake, will not. That will cause political problems.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), among others, referred to another reason for ensuring that Saddam Hussein leaves Kuwait when he said that the United Nations must not be allowed to fail in this enterprise. After 40 years of frustration caused by the obstructiveness of the Soviet Union and, sometimes, of China, the United Nations now has a magnificent opportunity to operate as its founders planned. A successful outcome to the whole affair would give the United Nations a new momentum to carry it forward, as was mentioned earlier by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), to the resolution of other problems, whereas the failure of our enterprise could set the United Nations back by a decade.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) that there must be a peacekeeping presence in the middle east after the immediate problem has ended, whether through withdrawal by Saddam Hussein or through war. The Iraqis have an army of 1 million men and they have the largest population of any Arab country in the immediate area. There must, therefore, be a multilateral or some other force in the area to prevent the repetition of aggression and it should be under the United Nations. It should, of course, contain Arab elements, but it will also have to contain non-Arab elements and some NATO countries. In that connection I, too, was interested by the speech made in Berlin yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

We shall have to take account of the chemical warfare capability and of the nuclear potential of Iraq. All that means that a financial burden and other burdens will face us, if I am right in my assessment. This will be an expensive operation, but it will be less expensive than keeping our forces in Germany for the past 40 years and it will certainly be less expensive than a renewal of instability in the Gulf.

6.26 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): From day one, the Opposition have taken the attitude that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) set out at the beginning of the debate. We have supported the United Nations as the most appropriate international body and means of resolving conflict between states. We see it as the body to be charged with enforcing international humanitarian law, as set out in the Hague convention of 1907 and in the Geneva convention of 1949. If properly enforced, those conventions should be more than sufficient to dissuade or prohibit states from carrying out an illegal agenda of occupation and annexation.

At this stage, we need to keep our nerve. Gathered together in the Security Council permanent membership are some of the most flagrant perpetrators of breaches of resolutions by the Security Council and by the General Assembly. If we keep our nerve today and insist on the

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

primacy of the United Nations, all the hon. Members who are concerned about other areas of the world—I will not go over them all—may feel confident that they can call to account the nation states that breach such resolutions.

I pick up a point made by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). I, too, believe that we need to do more than simply restate our support for the United Nations. There should not merely be parallel discussions; there are other actions that we can take.

In the declaration issued in Dublin on 26 June this year, the European Community leaders broke new ground in referring, for the first time, to the obligation placed on states parties to the fourth Geneva convention and especially to article 1 of that convention, which states:

"The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances".

By undertaking not only to respect the convention but to ensure respect for it in all circumstances, states parties, which include all member states of the Community, have taken upon themselves an ongoing responsibility to ensure that the convention is respected by its co-parties whenever and wherever it applies. The reference to the article 1 obligation in the Dublin declaration was a milestone in the recognition of the political significance of protecting human rights in the pursuit of conflict resolution.

The fourth Geneva convention sets out mandatory rules governing the conduct of an occupying power. The rules not only offer an important degree of protection of the most basic human rights of the civilian population of occupied territories but place important restraints and disincentives on the prosecution by the occupying power of an agenda of conquest, annexation and demographic transformation, by rendering the agenda illegal in its own right and by limiting the scope and nature of actions that an occupant may take against the population of an occupied territory.

In the Dublin declaration the Twelve combined their first reference to the article 1 obligation with a call for further action in accordance with the convention. The Council also took the opportunity to support a role for the United Nations in protecting the Palestinian population and the west bank and Gaza. In November, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Perez de Cuellar, in his report to the Security Council following the Dome of the Rock massacre in Jerusalem on 8 October, made the same points in greater detail and pointed to a way in which positive co-operation might be achieved for the objective of securing implementation in the occupied territories of the fourth Geneva convention.

Like the European Council, Mr. de Cuellar took note of the regrettable fact that Israel has not responded positively to the many calls to recognise the applicability of or abide by the fourth Geneva convention in the territories that it has occupied since 1967, including calls to that effect by the United Nations Security Council. If members of the European Community Council were to support Perez de Cuellar in his most recent comments and suggestions that there might be a convening of the states signatories to the fourth Geneva convention, it would not necessarily give Saddam Hussein any succour but it would demonstrate to the Arab states in particular and to the rest of the world that the Security Council is determined to continue to ensure that all states abide by Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

It is important to remind ourselves that, right now, there are attempts by the United States not to have that debate in the Security Council. It would surely give confidence to Arab countries if the United States were to allow it to go ahead.

All efforts to find a just and durable negotiated settlement to the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians are doomed to frustration unless and until the Israeli Government and their electorate are fully convinced that they do not have the option of asserting and exercising sovereignty in any part of the territories that have been occupied since 1967 and that, to the contrary, full withdrawal is essential. That is exactly the same message as we are giving to Saddam Hussein. My right hon. and hon. Friends must carefully consider the message that they will send to Saddam Hussein if they divide the House tonight.

We must also make certain that we ask for some assurances from the Government. One or two worrying comments have been made. In particular, the committee that has been formed in the United States by Richard Perle and his friends—the committee to remove Saddam Hussein and his military power—is one from which we must distance ourselves at every opportunity.

Equally, if the Kuwaitis and Iraqis, even before the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein and Iraqi forces from Kuwait, decide on some new arrangement in the area, the Government must accept that that will be the decision of those two nation states and that, provided that Saddam Hussein continues to meet Security Council resolutions, it is up to those two states to decide what arrangements to make between themselves to resolve the problem.

We must also make it clear that if we are to deal adequately with military power blocs in the middle east, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, we must also deal with the nuclear capacity and military power that Israel exercises in the area. It is not only the nuclear and chemical potential of the Iraqis with which we must deal.

The occupation and annexation of Kuwait by Iraq has raised questions about the new order in the post-cold war world and has brought to prominence the topic of international law, in particular laws of war, including those on belligerent occupation. There seems to be a growing realisation of the need to give effect to the provisions of the fourth Geneva convention to protect the civilian population under belligerent occupation. All hon. Members will recognise and welcome that. In particular, there is a growing awareness of the bottom line of non-selectivity in applying and enforcing the law. We must restate that point during such debates.

Although the search for a peace process appears to be effectively stalled in other parts of the world, we must say to those whom we represent and the families of service men and service women who are presently in the Gulf that it is our determination to support the United Nations so that those young people will not need to go to war again. Our determination to support the United Nations will surely convince Saddam Hussein that he must withdraw from Kuwait according to the very same United Nations resolutions.

6.36 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Four months and one week after Saddam Hussein's wicked and brutal invasion and annihilation of a tiny state that is friendly to us—an act of unjustified, naked aggression which the civilised world universally condemned and against which it has taken a firm stand through the United Nations—where are we? Saddam Hussein is still raping, pillaging, destroying and laughing at us for our feeble response, and where are we?

Yes, we have 450,000 troops in the desert, but how long will it be before they no longer want to remain there or no longer can remain there while Congress begins to weaken and its support peters out? Yes, we have firm resolutions in the United Nations, and ultimatums, but how long will that firmness last? Yes, we have imposed economic sanctions and there is some food rationing in Iraq, although food is being stolen from Kuwait, and there is some petrol rationing, but I think that that has been discontinued. Perhaps there will be some spare parts that will help to grind Iraqi industry to a halt because it cannot get any, and the water purification plants may fail. But will that happen before the will of Congress and some United Nations powers ebb and fail? Will that happen before Kuwait is entirely obliterated by Saddam Hussein?

What must he be thinking? He will be wondering whether we are any more than paper tigers. He sees the developing split in the United States Congress. He sees the demonstrations in the streets of the United States. He sees joy on the faces of the families of the hostages and gratitude to him for his acts of mercy. He sees those, such as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on "Newsnight" the other night, who talk about giving the islands and the oil wells to Saddam Hussein. He welcomes visits by world dignitaries such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and former Prime Ministers of Japan. He will read my right hon. Friend's speech with considerable satisfaction. He welcomes indications that an Arab-Israeli settlement and a conference are very much in the mind of our Government when the only thing that should be in their mind is Saddam Hussein's aggression.

He asks for time to negotiate and the United States Secretary of State is going to see him and speak to him. Why? Would anyone blame Saddam Hussein for thinking that Baker is going to negotiate, particularly when he reads sees and hears speeches in the House such as that of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East calling for negotiations, playing down any possibility of a threat of nuclear power developing in Iraq, speaking of linkage with the Arab-Israeli dispute and effectively saying, "No war at any cost"?

Would not Saddam Hussein be tempted to think that we are all losing our nerve, and that, if he stays in Kuwait or withdraws only partially, we shall risk not one life to force him out? Is that not the stench of appeasement in the air? Is not appeasement totally unacceptable to nations like the United Kingdom with any self-respect or any regard for the international rule of law?

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawrence: I shall give way, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be quick, because I have only 10 minutes.

Mr. Brown: I am not an appeaser, but, like many right hon. and hon. Members, I have been out there, at the sharp end and——

Mr. Lawrence: That is long enough.

Mr. Brown: Can I read out a letter from the British business community to the——

Mr. Lawrence: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order.

Mr. Brown: This is important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), who has the floor, has decided that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) has had long enough.

Mr. Lawrence: So what can we do——

Mr. Brown: This letter is not from members of the Labour party.

Mr. Lawrence: We should make clear, as we have never made clear before——

Mr. Brown: They have views that should be heard. Why is the hon. and learned Gentleman afraid to hear them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is hoping to catch the eye of the Chair. He is not improving his chances.

Mr. Lawrence: I have learnt the lesson that I should not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I was asking what we should then do. We should make clear, if we have not made clear enough before, that if economic sanctions do not work soon in securing the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, we should drag him out by force. There can be no more delay and no more dithering. What should "soon" mean? It should mean 15 January 1991, a date beyond which resolution 678 says that "all necessary measures"—meaning force, because what else on earth could it mean?—can be taken to supplement economic sanctions and drive him out.

If we do not set a date, there will be no sanction worthy of the name, and the rule of law with no enforceable sanction is no rule of law. If we do not set a date and enforce that date, Saddam Hussein will win. There will be nothing to stop him taking over other countries, safe in the knowledge that we do not have the necessary will to stop him. There will be nothing to stop other Saddam Husseins from doing the same thing, and the world would end up in chaos.

If we climb down and refuse to set a date, the greatest potential force for peace and security in the world—the United Nations—will be, as the Leader of the Opposition said, little more than a public mourner, spectator and charity worker. I would add that it would be little more than a gutless, hopeless institution, incapable of standing up for the rule of law and what is right. If we climb down because we refuse to set a date, world peace will be threatened. The aggression will go on until we have to fight, and when we have to fight the war will be far bloodier than we have envisaged.

Saddam Hussein has used chemical weapons against his own people, so he is unlikely to refrain from using them against others. He has been responsible for the deaths of 1 million people in the Iran-Iraq war, so he is unlikely to

[Mr. Lawrence]

be worried about the loss of life. He is developing a nuclear capability, which may be ready for use within the year, or sooner. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East quoted from the International Atomic Energy Agency. If he were here, could he have told us whether it had investigated the uranium mines in the north of Iraq from which it is said that Saddam Hussein is even now mining the uranium that will give him the capability to manufacture nuclear weapons? If we are frightened to stand up to Saddam Hussein now, will we not be even more frightened to do so when he has nuclear weapons?

There is a fair measure of consensus in the House of Commons which has not been revealed by the speeches made today. Some speeches from the Conservative Benches—in particular that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup—and most from the Labour Benches have been contrary to the line taken by both the Government and the Opposition. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup drew an analogy with Kennedy and Khrushchev over the Bay of Pigs and spoke of how discussion and negotiations could work. That analogy is so false that I cannot even begin to understand how he could have made it.

There are two fundamental differences. First, Saddam Hussein invaded an innocent, harmless country in flagrant defiance of international law, and destroyed that country, murdering hundreds, if not thousands, of people. That is something that Khrushchev had not done before embarking on the Bay of Pigs operation. He never invaded Cuba. Secondly, Saddam Hussein's action has been condemned time and again by the United Nations. Khrushchev's actions before the Bay of Pigs were not so condemned. It is difficult to see how my right hon. Friend could have seen a similarity between the two events. He has given a misleading and damaging signal to Saddam Hussein which I utterly deplore.

The issue that we have to address, and about which there is insufficient agreement in the House, however much other consensus there may be, is timing. How much longer do we give Saddam Hussein to comply with the United Nations resolution? Do we wait until our troops have lost the will or ability to enforce sanctions; until the Arab countries supporting the United Nations get tired of our dithering and make their own peace with Saddam Hussein; or until Saddam Hussein has developed nuclear weapons and made it impossible for us to force him out?

I hope and pray that Saddam Hussein will withdraw before 15 January 1991 so that war is avoided. If he is to do that, he will have to start soon. I hope and pray that he has no inclination to turn his attention towards Israel when he does withdraw, or truly terrible bloodshed will follow. If my hopes and prayers are not answered, then Saddam Hussein must be forced out. We can follow no other course if we want to maintain the integrity of the United Nations and ensure stability and relative peace in the world.

6.47 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The likelihood of war in the Gulf seems to have diminished a little. The confrontation remains stark, but the atmosphere has eased. This may be deceptive. For, even before Saddam Hussein's decision to release the hostages, it had become clear that the balance of advantage has passed to him, and this was predictable. Saddam Hussein's Iraq had come to present a face of monolithic resolution to the world, in marked contrast to the discordant voices of the west. As the timetable of the allied military preparedness to act appeared to slip, public doubts grew about whether war is justifiable, acceptably feasible or even likely to take place.

Since August, President Bush and his team have done their best to persuade Americans and their representatives in Congress that the threat of imminent war against Iraq must be maintained, but the critical clinching reason for a fight still eludes the Administration. The President has been forced on the defensive as he seeks to convince the world and domestic opinion that all the options for peace have been exhausted before the momentous decision to go to war in the Gulf is taken. What will be the position if those options are kept open for a further 12 months, say on the ground of sanctions? I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) is no longer in his place.

The memory of Vietnam is also a factor in the growing peace movement in America, as is the suspicion that once again American youth is being called upon to die in defence of Europe's interests. This lack of cohesion and solidarity has painfully exposed the underlying divisions in the western alliance, and reinforced the need to see European security in a broader global context, and for the alliance to think long and hard concerning its future policy towards threats beyond its traditional area of competence.

In contrast, Saddam has shown that his nerves are stronger than those of western democracies. He knows that talking will not by itself stop war, but he also knows that it offers him his best hope of exploiting American domestic weakness and dividing the international alliance against him. He will have been encouraged by the weekend headlines in our own quality press. *The Sunday Times*, for example, stated:

"Iraq scents victory as Gulf peace deal looms".

The Sunday Telegraph stated:

"America insists: we're not going soft on Saddam".

Those were the headlines just two days ago.

Yet, despite all that has happened since August, the essentials remain unchanged. The invasion of Kuwait in August was an act of aggression. The United Nations, in the most impressive fashion, acted against Saddam Hussein. Now that the United States and the United Kingdom and some of their allies have committed their armed forces and prestige, the blow to international order would be intolerable if Saddam were able to extract any victory or face-saving compromise.

Saddam has also turned the Gulf crisis into a crisis for democracy. He has raised with brutal clarity the central issue at stake: are western democracies resilient enough to resist blackmail or are they too short-sighted to perceive threats to their longer-term interests?

So there can be no compromise on Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. There can be no question of profit to the aggressor. If aggression is permitted to succeed, other acts of brutality by bigger nations against their smaller neighbours will be encouraged. So there can be no weakening of our position. However, there can be no western objection to subsequent talks about disputed territories and their borders. Nor can there be any valid

objection to a possible mutual non-aggression pact, despite the repeated demand of *The Sunday Times* for Saddam to be toppled.

There can be no accommodation of the issue of linkage. Saddam has been demanding that Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait be linked to Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. This is unacceptable: neither Israel nor Syria can be charged with aggression, as Saddam can. However, both issues must resume their place at the very top of the middle east agenda if Iraq withdraws from Kuwait. Palestinians, no less than Kuwaitis, are entitled to equal justice under international law.

What disturbs me most of all is the extent to which the retreat into moral as well as political isolationism by certain sections of western opinion, some of which are represented by hon. Members on both sides of the House, threatens to undermine any chance of the United Nations ever asserting a collective will again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East referred to the 1930s. Perhaps I can take just a few seconds to tell the House that I did my first canvassing for the Labour party when I was 12 years old at the behest of my headmaster. I canvassed for the League of Nations and for what was then Labour party policy—collective security. Ten years later, I was a casualty of war and for many years was 100 per cent. disabled. I am still 30 per cent. disabled. I am sorry to have to say that because I know that the House does not really want to listen to it, but I must say it to leave the House in no doubt that I do not address the issues of war and peace lightly. By God, I know and I reflect on the missed opportunities of the 1930s. I do not want collective security to fail again. That is the big issue for me. Saddam must not be given any ground for believing that he can undermine international order, that there is any weakening in our resolve or that this country and our allies will not go through with what they have threatened for so many months. What is certain is that no future challenge can even be credibly approached by the United Nations unless the present challenge is overcome.

I suspect that most hon. Members recognise that sanctions will not be effective within an acceptable time scale. I listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East with great respect, as I always do, but, if it comes, the war will have a legal and moral basis. We all recognise that war is probable, although the timing will be subject to the constraints of campaigning weather, but the present "window" will last only until the end of February. We all profoundly regret that probability of war. However, if we will the end, we must be especially concerned for the means and particularly for our service men and women in the Gulf area. We must have the greatest confidence in them, especially those who will shortly come together—I hope—in the United Kingdom's first armoured division. I know and have the greatest respect and admiration for the United States' first and second armoured divisions, but a more effective or distinguished fighting unit will not be deployed in the Gulf than our own first armoured division. Our prayers will always be with the service men and women.

However, none of us can dispute that a compromise that leaves Saddam with any portion of his booty would be a lasting blow to the interests of the whole world. This is not a time for dithering and wobbling. I suggest with great respect that our resolution must match that of our fighting men if we are to be worthy of them.

6.55 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): We have just heard a very good speech from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). The whole House listened to every word. Saddam Hussein need only take into account the fact that if he complies with resolution 660 and vacates Kuwait, that will be the end of all this. He can ensure peace by doing just that.

The way in which the crisis began is extraordinary. On 1 August there was a conference in Saudi Arabia at which the Iraqis were represented and Saddam Hussein gave an assurance that he would not attack Kuwait. On 2 August, he attacked Kuwait. What account can we take of his later assurances and representations? Furthermore, Saddam Hussein has used gas against the Kurds, who are an ethnic minority in his territories, and he may well use it against other people. He is not a humane man who can look after children. He is a man who determined on his major course and, if he can divert the course of justice, he will take us to that end.

Saddam Hussein has destroyed Kuwait. He has virtually razed that country to the ground. According to a report in the newspapers this morning, the damage is estimated at $60 billion. We have learnt from my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that the loss to Jordan amounts to the considerable sum of about $60 million. Obviously, if there is to be a settlement, there will have to be payment of reparation. However, as Saddam Hussein has a significant world indebtedness of about $80 billion, he cannot pay reparations. He will just turn aside and say, "This is not my responsibility".

We have been told that there will be an Arab solution and that we should let the Arabs decide this among themselves. However, the Arab solution will simply consist of saying, "Look at the great man—the new Saladin—in the middle east and subserve to his interests." In other words, other states will back off, which would be extremely detrimental to the western world.

My next illustration is in a world context. If one takes the reserves of crude oil, measured in billions of barrels, one can say that the Iraqis have 100 billion barrels. If one adds to that amount the reserves of Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, the total amounts to 30 per cent. of the world's reserves of crude oil. If one adds to that Saudi Arabia, which itself can be compromised, it brings the total to 53·5 per cent. of the world's reserves of crude oil. Gentlemen may say, "Let us turn it aside—the fields will not be plundered; Hussein will make them available to other nations afterwards because he will have to build his economy." Let us make no mistake about it. The price of oil would rocket to about $90 per barrel. Saddam Hussein would want his pound of flesh to pay for the campaign that he has waged against the Iranians. Could we afford to pay that price?

There is another interesting point to be made about production. Saddam Hussein has mentioned that he wants a simple solution. He wants the territory to be divided into two. He does not want to withdraw entirely from Kuwait. He wants the Rumaila field and two significant islands which give him access to the Gulf. Taking into account the reserves of oil that he has recently discovered, his barrelage would have built up considerably. His only rival in the middle east would be Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia agrees

[Sir Trevor Skeet]

that the Iraqis are great competitors. Iraq is not a great competitor of Iran, because Iran's reserves tend to be stabilised at present.

In the western world we are told by people such as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) that we can become independent from the middle east, but how can that possibly be achieved in the next 20 or 30 years when the middle east countries have the supplies available and are prepared to yield them to the western world? Iraq has several fields in production and about 10 fields under development. It is short of foreign exchange, so it cannot develop the fields properly. There is anxiety that the Iraqis will put a match to all the fields in operation, even including their own, but such fields can automatically be shut off if they are worked properly and fires can be put out.

Of course, war is costly in human life, but the cost of doing nothing or virtually nothing can be even more costly over the course of time. Democracies are not good at looking after their own defence. Many of us who remember the world stage between 1933 and 1939 recognise that it would have been cheaper to have a war in 1935 than it was when the war came in 1939. We were unprepared because of suggestions made in the House, and we lost many people at great cost.

My message to the House is that we have major problems in the middle east. I want to be constructive.

Mr. Ron Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Trevor Skeet: No. I do not have the time, and I learned from the previous Conservative speaker that the Opposition's questions are not sound.

If the world could only get together a concert of nations to guarantee the boundaries of the middle east states, as the Antarctica convention countries have come together to guarantee the lands of Antarctica, something similar could be established in the middle east. We could not allow Saddam Hussein to spill into other territories. If the ambition and tyranny of other nations could be contained, we could have security.

Saddam Hussein is worried about two principal points. First, there is his problem with the Rumaila field, of which nine tenths is within his territory now and only one tenth in Kuwait. He could refer that boundary dispute to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, where the matter could be simply resolved. There is broad experience of such disputes. Many of the United Kingdom fields go over into Norway and other territories. We work out unitisation agreements and settle such matters amicably. If Saddam Hussein wanted to settle the dispute amicably, he could do so. There is no reason for him to take over northern Kuwait. He could settle the matter either by a unitisation agreement or by reference to the International Court of Justice.

Saddam Hussein's second problem is access to the Gulf waters. After an eight-year war he surrendered all the territory around the beginning of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. That territory would have given him access to the Gulf, but he now wants the two Kuwaiti islands. With his consent, his claim to the two pieces of territory could be referred to the international court. However, the matter must be referred by mutual consent. I am certain that Kuwait would give that consent, but Saddam Hussein would not give his. He claims the area as the 19th province of Iraq. If he lost at the international court, he would have to concede the territory and world security would again be secured.

We must be careful that the democracies are not taken for a long ride in seeking to maintain peace at the expense of principle. They must not be taken on a long journey which will take them nowhere but merely result in an accumulation of problems in the middle east which will eventually cause complete disaster. I hope that wise counsel will prevail.

7.6 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): At least today the Government have spoken with complete clarity. When the vote takes place—for there will be a vote—the meaning of a vote in the Government Lobby will be clear. The Government said in September that article 51 provided the legal basis for war. Today the Foreign Secretary said that the resolution carried by the Security Council provided a political authority for war. I and others have pressed the Government on whether they feel that the House of Commons has any right to vote on the matter. It does not have that right within our constitution, but that does not exclude the possibility of a vote. We have been told no. Combined with that we have a warning to British residents in terms which imply that military action may be likely.

I repeat what I said a moment ago. There will be a vote tonight. Those who vote with the Government, from whatever party, will be cited by the Government as supporting the interpretation of the legal and political position that I have just described.

By contrast, I and some of my hon. Friends have tabled a motion which says that

"this House believes that a peaceful solution to all the problems of the Middle East is both possible and necessary within the framework of the United Nations Charter and the resolutions of the Security Council; and therefore declines to support the threat or use of military force by the United States of America or Britain."

There is no hint of appeasement in that because it is a reference to the United Nations resolution and charter. So tonight the choice is stark. I shall not go into the effects of war in any detail because it has been dwelt on by others. The consequence of war will not fall on those who think it right to fight one. No one in this House will be killed in a war. Many hundreds of thousands of innocent people—our own soldiers, American soldiers, Iraqis, Kuwaitis and Arabs in the middle east—will undoubtedly be killed by a massive exchange of the most modern weapons which, in many cases, were sold to both sides at a great profit by British and American arms manufacturers. We should realise that.

Chemical weapons are very likely to be used. They have been used before. The Americans used them in Vietnam. Agent orange was a chemical weapon used to defoliate the forest. Chemical weapons have been used by the Iraqis. Nuclear weapons are possessed by Israel and, indeed, by United States and British forces.

In the event of a war, the price of oil would put it beyond the range of the purchasing capacity of the third world. It is possible that more would die of starvation in the third world as a result of economic chaos than as a direct result of the war. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) constantly emphasises the

environmental aspect; a war with Iraq would probably lead to the greatest environmental catastrophe since the atom bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

During my talks with King Hussein two weeks ago, he expressed the view that, even without a war, the size of the armed forces in the middle east was likely to bring about the fall of dynasties, including the Saudi dynasty. The Saudi holy places are now defended by American troops —Christian troops—who are not allowed to conduct Christian services in Saudi Arabia. It is not even possible to sell a bible to a British soldier in Saudi Arabia. So much for our defence of human rights and political liberty.

It has sometimes been said that I have cited the cases of Panama, Grenada, the Lebanon and Cyprus as arguments for not taking action. I cited them with a view to identifying the odious hypocrisy of those who now say that we should take action, having never said it in those other instances. Two million people died in the Vietnam war; as I have said, the Americans used chemical weapons to defoliate the forest, but anyone who criticised that war was denounced anti-American—never described as pro-United Nations.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: No: I have only a few moments.

I have listened to the speeches of the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) since the time of Suez. None of the matters that he has mentioned is covered by United Nations resolution. He talked of a permanent base, and of the need for the Arabs to be guided by foreign forces; others talk of a NATO out-of-area force. No UN resolution calls for that. People talk about control of the oil; there is no UN resolution entitling nations to go to war for that reason. "Topple Saddam," people say. Where is the UN resolution calling for him to be toppled, for Iraq to be demilitarised, for the war crimes tribunal to be brought into play? There are no such resolutions.

The difficulty in which the House finds itself is that we are told that we are here to defend the United Nations, while the speeches bear no relation to what the UN is about. In September, we were told that we were here to defend Saudi Arabia; now the position has changed again. The "nightmare scenario" of which people speak is not the nightmare of Saddam's remaining in Kuwait, but the nightmare of his withdrawing from Kuwait. Many military and political experts in Washington and London fear that, if he withdrew, their casus belli would go.

Those are some of the problems that face us. Another is the role of Israel. I well remember that in 1956—I clashed with the right hon. Member for Pavilion at the time—Israel, France and Britain colluded in an Israeli intervention that allowed the Government to claim that they were separating the forces when they had encouraged Israel to make that attack. I fear that Israel, misunderstanding its own long-term interest, may be tempted to trigger a conflict if it sees Saddam withdraw, and the American forces with him.

We must wind down the war machines and start to get the talks going. I pay warm tribute to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)—I hope that I shall not embarrass him—for the courageous stand that he has taken, and the wisdom of his speech, with which I wholly concur. I think that, without consultation, Willy Brandt, he and I all said the same to Saddam Hussein: "Free all the hostages; they represent no gain to you. Comply with all the United Nations resolutions." It is not in his interests to stand against the UN, and, if he wants resolution 242 to be implemented, he should bear that in mind.

We must think about guarantees of no attack. Of course, the disputed areas must be the subject of arbitration by the Arab states—not by American forces, because their role is not to be there. We want the withdrawal of all foreign bases and forces from the middle east, with no attempt to reimpose the old imperialism.

I listened carefully to the Foreign Secretary's speech on 7 September. One of the most significant aspects was his analysis of the role of the UN. I believe in the UN: as I have said before, I felt—like every member of my generation—that it represented the alternative to war. My party supports it, too; I moved the amendment to clause 4 of our constitution, in 1960, to insert the commitment to the UN, which had never been there before. On 7 September, the Foreign Secretary said:

> "Some people, particularly Opposition Members, talk of this development in terms of great aspirations and the brotherhood of man. I see it in more traditional, Tory terms . . . I see it in Tory terms as an increasingly effective concept of nations acting in sensible self interest for the preservation and extension of international order."—[*Official Report*, 7 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 902.]

Those are two entirely different views of what is to follow the cold war.

Mr. Hurd: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I am afraid that the time limit prevents me from extending the courtesy to the right hon. Gentleman —*[Interruption.]*—unless I am given injury time.

Mr. Hurd: Whatever our view of the origin of the UN, the fact is that it has now authorised the use of force by member states in pursuit of its resolutions.

Mr. Benn: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. The UN has not authorised the use of force, because "force" would not have got through: it says "other means".

There is one interpretation of American action in the Gulf which is not a UN interpretation. I am referring to the reimposition of white, industrialised, western control over the rest of the world. Now that the cold war is over, the white nations can get together like Queen Victoria's grandsons—the Kaiser, the King and the Czar—and run the third world. We will not have it, and we will divide the House against the Government tonight.

7.16 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My knowledge of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf goes back a number of years. I used to travel there extensively as a banker before I was elected to the House, and I still have a connection with a bank that is largely owned by Saudi Arabian interests. I therefore know a fair amount about the area.

Everyone—especially those who know that part of the world—has welcomed Iraq's decision to release the hostages, and must welcome their return even more. I believe that, apart from being welcome on humanitarian grounds, that return is a clear signal of a shift in the Iraqi Government's attitude to the occupation of Kuwait. I believe that their new attitude makes war much less likely than it was last week—or, indeed, at any time since last August. There is now a real prospect that Iraq will leave Kuwait rather than face a war.

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

I believe that there are three reasons for that. One I have already mentioned: the return of the hostages, which, paradoxically, makes war more likely from Iraq's point of view, because it removes one disincentive for an American attack. The second is the pillage of Kuwait and the destruction of Kuwait City, which makes very little sense unless the intention is to leave Kuwait at some stage. If the Iraqis intended to remain, they would surely have some interest in maintaining a coastal city with some purpose.

The third reason is the certainty of military defeat. If there were a war—which I believe that the Iraqi forces would lose—we would end up not only with serious problems for Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, but with a serious defeat for the PLO and Yasser Arafat in particular. I do not believe that the Iraqi Government want either.

We are now seeing clear indications that the threat of war is receding, and that, if we keep up the military and diplomatic pressure on the Iraqi Government, that Government will start to seek a negotiated solution.

Iraq must not be rewarded for its aggression. That must be the basis of any future negotiations. There can be no solution to the problem which would leave Iraq, at least at this stage, in possession of the Rumaila oilfield or the Bubiyan and Warba islands. But we must consider what the situation will be like in the Gulf in due course.

Mr. Heath: Is my hon. Friend excluding paragraph 3 of resolution 660, which says that they must reconcile their differences?

Mr Carrington: No; and if my right hon. Friend listens to the remainder of my remarks he will appreciate why I made those comments. The differences must be reconciled because no one would benefit from a defeat of Iraq which left that country as a weakened regional power in the Gulf. The Gulf survives on a balance of power, and it is essential that that balance is maintained. If we set about destroying Iraq, and if Iraq and Kuwait do not negotiate their differences, the destruction of that balance of power would benefit nobody in the middle east.

In anticipation of finding a solution, we must consider what lay behind the Iraq invasion of Kuwait. We must accept that whatever the outcome—war or a negotiated solution—Iraq will still be a major military force in the middle east. There is no likelihood—I have never thought that there ever was a likelihood—that any military action would succeed in disarming Iraq. The United Nations resolutions clearly state that there is no intention of invading Iraq. Nor do I believe that there is a political or military capability to do so, certainly not on the part of the Americans.

The fundamental question that underlies everything that has gone on in the Gulf, and the reason why Saddam Hussein could get popular support for his action not only in his own country but in many others in the middle east, is the Palestinian problem. The Palestinian-Israeli problem is the cause, in many ways the cancer, of what is going on in the middle east. We shall not achieve peace in the area without a solution to the Palestinian problem, because even if we were to solve the current problem another would arise, and the balance of power would inevitably cause future threats of conflict, and those, in turn, would have to be tackled.

I do not think we can accept a linkage at this stage between the troubles in the Gulf and the Israeli-Palestinian problem, but we must start looking now for hopes of a solution to that problem, and perhaps the situation in the Gulf gives hope that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem is available.

The PLO has been severely weakened. There is no question but that its support for Iraq, and Saddam Hussein personally, has made the PLO's position more difficult. Indeed, the PLO is showing increasing signs of losing control of the intifada in Palestine.

Israel would also be in a severely weakened position if we managed to avoid war. Israel has been critically weakened, if only because American support can no longer be taken for granted. I hope that America has had a considerable fright over what has happened in the middle east and will now look at its Israeli policy and say that there can be no lasting solution to the problems there unless Israel is prepared to negotiate with the Palestinians and to find a solution to the west bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem.

I hope it is right to say that the noises coming out of Washington will be carried through into policy initiatives and will put real pressure on Israel. We have heard similar noises in the past, but we have not had real pressure put on Israel to negotiate.

Another situation makes the possibility of a solution greater still, and that is that the oil-rich states of the Gulf now have a vested interest in finding a just solution—one that they might be prepared to fund—to the Palestinian problem, meaning that the Palestinians would have to find a political solution with the Israelis. If we can find a financial solution, funded by the Arab oil states, perhaps we shall be some way towards finding a solution to that problem.

I do not pretend to have the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem. It is a complex and bitter problem which goes back a long way. But it can be solved only by negotiation and discussion, hopefully under the auspices of the United Nations. I have some reservations about a middle east UN conference to solve the problem if only because conferences seem to lead to a lot of talk and not much decision taking.

Unless there is willingness on the part of the PLO and the Israelis to talk to each other and reach a solution, any conference would just drag on indefinitely and produce no lasting solution. There must be negotiations specifically between Israel and the PLO, and I hope that the fears and pressures that have emanated from the situation in the Gulf will exert enough world pressure on the Israelis and the PLO to get them to come to such negotiations.

We have been staring into the abyss in the Gulf, and we may yet go into it. I hope that we shall manage to avoid doing so. But there will be another crisis in the middle east unless we find a solution now to the Palestinian problem. I hope that the horror we have seen—the potential for military conflict in the Gulf staring us in the face—has frightened enough people into deciding that it is better to negotiate on problems rather than to fight over them.

7.26 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): This is the first time I have spoken in a foreign affairs debate and I do so with considerable diffidence as the issues are extremely grave and significant. My right hon. Friend the

Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made a wise and crafty speech—I use those words as terms of honour, as there should be in politics—in which he described the situation clearly and said that he proposed to support the Government today because that would show support for the United Nations.

I followed my right hon. Friend's logic clearly, but I did not agree with him. To support the Government today would not be to support the United Nations because, for the reason which my right hon. Friend put forward and which I found compelling, the Government have throughout stated a lack of belief in the strategy of sanctions. In so doing, they have allowed themselves to become boxed in by the military timetable, to use words similar to those used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton.

Once we depart from the conviction that sanctions can work, we allow ourselves to become boxed in by the military timetable. That leaves us saying that either the situation must be resolved by mid to late March or it cannot be resolved at all. Once we cast doubt on whether the coalition which has been brought to bear on the situation can endure through another summer, we are boxing ourselves into a situation in which we say that either we must have a war before the next fighting season is over or we must contrive a peace which leaves the Iraqi war machine intact. That is precisely the corner in which the British Government, and to a lesser degree the United States Government, now find themselves, and it is an unhappy situation in which to be.

The first, central and specific obligation of the United Nations resolutions in these matters was to impose sanctions through a combination of physical containment backed by the use of armed force. That force has already been used, and rightly so, to enforce sanctions to that limited degree. The mistake of the United States and the British Government was always to talk down the possibility of that policy being successful. Talk of war crimes and reparations has increased Saddam Hussein's hold over his own people, whereas a policy of attrition would have separated him from his own people.

The creation of a United Nations middle east peace council three months ago would have provided an opportunity to hand the initiative over to moderate Arab and Israeli opinion in the region and give a wider, positive context for the demilitarisation of Iraq and the region. Now that same initiative, which should properly have been undertaken three months ago, looks like a face saver to leave the Iraqi war machine intact. It is a propaganda success for the Iraqis of the British and American Governments' contrivance.

By publicly casting doubt on whether a policy of siege —sanctions, containment, the back-up of armed force— could hold and the multinational containment force be kept together, the United States and Britain have forced themselves into an impasse. They must either succeed in getting the eviction of Iraq from Kuwait by the end of the fighting season in March, or suffer a defeat which would mean that the United Nations had failed. The self-imposed deadline for confrontration never had any legitimacy. It was never true that if we believed that patient, armed determination could work in the long term—if we believed in a policy of siege—we were therefore appeasers. On the contrary—once one departs from a siege policy, one puts one self, one's forces and the cause for which one stands in an impossible position.

We face a grave crisis. In my community I can see what the neglect of a siege policy means. I have had to witness the jobs of 600 heavy engineering workers on Tyneside being sacrificed because the Government did not believe in their own policy of sanctions and offered no protection to the industrial companies caught up in the consequences.

We never seem to recognise that Saddam Hussein's war machine has no economic base in his own country, other than that provided by the armament industries of the east and west. Siege can and will work. In undermining the belief in the possibility of siege, the Government have given themselves a false choice between a war which cannot succeed politically or economically, even if it succeeds militarily, and a peace which cannot be secured or sustained because no one will believe in it while the Iraqi war machine is intact. Those reasons for believing in a siege do not show any lack of support for the United Nations, the objectives of collective security or, in this instance, the United Nations' chosen first means to secure its objective. In not supporting the Government today, we shall not be underwriting a policy of appeasement or showing any lack of commitment to the cause taken up by the United Nations.

7.34 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I declare an interest in the debate as a member of the Territorial Army.

A few years ago Mr. Gorbachev challenged the world to a new order—it was not a challenge of war, but of peace. He proposed to change the very nature of peace itself, from a peace of nuclear deterrence to a peace of detente—to allow for the institution of the international rule of law. Now, that new peace of detente faces its first great challenge by an international pirate, Saddam Hussein.

If Saddam Hussein is not brought to book, we must ask ourselves what other pirates will follow. If Saddam Hussein is not brought to book, what future will there be for the peace of detente, which will have effectively been killed at birth? If Saddam Hussein is not brought to book, what will remain of the threat he poses to the middle east, particularly as he is likely, within the next year or two, to gain a nuclear capability? In short, the international rule of law is now on trial.

In the interests of peace, the allies now in the Gulf simply must succeed, whether by sanctions or by the use of force. I believe that our Government are trying hard to find a peaceful solution. But the choice of whether it is a peaceful solution or one involving the use of force clearly lies in the hands of Saddam Hussein.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who is not present now, suggested that we should have more discussion. He gave as an example an incident in the Cuban crisis of the 1960s involving John F. Kennedy and Mr. Khrushchev. He made a powerful case. However, he ignored the essential differences between the Gulf crisis of the 1990s and the Cuban crisis of the 1960s, which is that Mr. Khrushchev was acting legally on the high seas. His action may have posed a great threat to the United States and world peace, but he was acting legally on the high seas. That is not so with President Hussein, who is acting as a pirate having used armed aggression. Saddam Hussein's human rights transgressions, which occur daily, are so dreadful that they

[Mr. John Browne]

have to be seen to be believed. Therefore, I see little similarity between the Gulf crisis of the 1990s and the Cuban crisis of the 1960s.

We all know that war, if it happens, will be terrible, with many people killed and much suffering. But the pain and suffering would be less, probably considerably less, than the pain that would be suffered if we allowed such international piracy to be seen to succeed, especially with the spread of nuclear weapons to countries such as Iraq.

If there is a war, the balance of power in the middle east will surely be changed for ever. If there is a war, the battle may be quick, but its effects and implications for the allies are likely to be long term. For instance, if Iraq were neutralised, it would leave Israel as the only local super-power in the middle east. In such circumstances, we must prepare for a long-term commitment.

At the very moment when we are asking our young men and women to risk their lives, "Options for Change" and the peace dividend policy are actively pursued. I wonder what effect such talk has on the British Army of the Rhine, where people are being asked actively to study "Options for Change" at the same time as men and women are being posted from BAOR to the Gulf. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House this evening that "Options for Change" will be shelved, at least until the middle east crisis is clarified?

It amazes me that, while we call for volunteers from the Territorial Army and the reserves and deplete other units to reinforce those in the Gulf, we still have a cap on recruiting to the very regiments and corps being sent to the Gulf. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that recruit capping will be lifted, at least for those regiments and corps likely to be deployed in the Gulf?

Deployment to the Gulf has been a great success, particularly from a logistics angle, over extended lines of communications. Sincere congratulations are deserved for a job well done. However, I noticed a strange system of reinforcement for some of the line units. It is a system which worries me. We all accept that line units on peace-time establishment in BAOR must be considerably increased in number to put them on war establishment. BAOR is well used to the flexible deployment of combat teams from one regiment or battalion to another. But the first line of reinforcements to our units first deployed in the Gulf was effected by attracting experienced, highly trained and highly motivated men from combat teams and deploying them as individual soldiers into other regiments. That smacked of our moving towards a corps of infantry. It broke up trained and highly motivated teams, and most importantly it divided men from their officers. I cannot see that that was good.

As an example I cite the experience of the first battalion Grenadier guards, from which 186 men were taken and deployed to a fine regiment of the line—but devoid of their officers. Although trained for four years at vast expense and highly successful, they were not teams any more. I ask my right hon. Friend to assure the House that the concept of a corps of infantry is not part of Army thinking; and to assure the House that future reinforcements deployed to the Gulf will be met by the transfer of complete combat teams, not by the assignment of individual soldiers from trained battalions.

We cannot be certain that the Gulf conflict will be short, so we must plan prudently for long-term commitment. Has my right hon. Friend taken all necessary measures comprehensively to support our armed forces in the Gulf for an extended war in the middle east? Furthermore, will he take measures to ensure job security for members of the Territorial Army and the regular reserve who volunteer in response to his legitimate call?

In this respect I must mention the band of the Royal Greenjackets from my constituency. Its members have been deployed as stretcher bearers, a tough and risky task. I need not remind my right hon. Friend that the Royal Army Medical Corps has more Victoria crosses than any other regiment or corps in the British Army and that it has the only two British double Victoria crosses. That is testimony to the sort of job that these people may have to carry out if war breaks out in the middle east. It will be tough, and I am sure that the House wishes them God's protection.

If Saddam Hussein chooses the military option, we must not flinch. The Government have done an excellent job under difficult conditions, and we must stand firm behind them. If we are seen to waver, that will encourage war. I believe—I am sure that this view is held by my right hon. Friend—that peace alone is not enough. What we demand is peace with freedom.

7.42 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) in detail except to ask him one question. Members of Opposition parties arguing for continuing with sanctions are asked by Conservative Members, "For how long?" The hon. Gentleman talked about a long-term war deployment in the Gulf, so we must ask him, "For how long?"

In a crisis it is vital that the political actors behave responsibly and rationally. We have had a fairly rational debate this evening, as we had in September. In taking practical decisions in the House and in government we need to adopt a thoughtful approach. Such an approach is more likely to be helpful than a fundamentalist response or a gut reaction. We need to keep cool heads and adopt a philosophical approach.

A crisis is also a matter of perception. Good diplomacy and effective action require an understanding of other people's perceptions without necessarily accepting them as valid. One perception that we need to correct is the tendency for Parliament to behave as though it were still in the 19th century—as though we were the main actors on the international scene. In fact, we are the fourth, fifth or even sixth players in the crisis. The first players are the peoples in the middle east: ordinary Kuwaiti and Iraqi citizens, who are dominated internally and externally; other dominated minorities in the region, including the Palestinians and the Kurds; the state of Israel; and the Arab states and the Arab nation.

The major centres of decision making in the crisis are in the United States—in the United Nations building in New York, in the White House and on Capitol hill in Washington, DC. Although the United Kingdom is not the main player, there seems far less of a wide-ranging debate here about the resolution of the Gulf crisis than there is in the United States. Congress has far more real democratic powers over the Executive than does this

Parliament, and there is a culture of openness in United States politics which even extends to the military. What we can do this evening is lend our rational voices, as democratic representatives, to the debate taking place in other centres of decision making, particularly in the United States.

No one in this House, least of all members of my party, will ever say anything in defence of the Iraqi regime. We are on record as being severely critical of the human rights record of that regime, particularly in Kurdistan, and when I—together with other hon. Members—raised the issue of Hallabjah not much fuss was made at the time about the chemical warfare and genocide against the Kurdish people by the Ba'athist regime. There must be a reversal of the unjustified occupation of Kuwait and of the aggression by Iraq. This debate is about the most effective way of ensuring such a reversal, coupled with a review of security in the entire region.

The issue is not whether it is legitimate to use all necessary means after 15 January; what is at issue is the most effective means of resolving the crisis. The arguments for taking military action used by the United States Administration are conflicting and confusing. The move from desert shield to desert sword by the United States is not merely rhetorical. The scale of over-deployment early on led to the build-up of capability beyond that necessary to resist further aggression into Saudi Arabia. That led to demands not merely for repelling the Iraqi forces from Kuwait but for destroying the military capability of the Iraqi regime. No United Nations resolution provides a basis for that.

Arguments for early military action include such statements as, "The international coalition of states against Hussein cannot be sustained." But surely an all-out war with a high toll of Arab civilian casualties would test the unity of the allies far more than patient pressure over a longer time. The argument for military action concentrates on the fact that the United States deployment, along with that of the United Kingdom and of other allies, will be at its peak early next year, but that is a cyclical argument arising from the initial deployment decisions. If the hot weather in the desert after February is the argument for striking early after 15 January, are the military experts really saying that a war can be successfully concluded before the long hot desert weather? What kind of civilian casualties would be inflicted in an air strike-led counter invasion at that time?

Another argument is that an early strike would prevent Iraq from becoming a nuclear power. It is not so long since spokespeople for the Bush Administration were saying that Iraq's nuclear capability posed no immediate danger. Surely diplomacy leading to a binding nuclear non-proliferation and chemical weapons treaty is the only way in which nuclear capability can be scaled down, as has happened in Europe.

How can the undertaking of military action be seen to bring about more effectively the resolution of the longstanding political conflicts in the region? Whatever view we may take of so-called linkages, those linkages exist in the perception of millions in the Arab nation. They are the linkages of hypocrisy, and it is only through understanding them that we can assist in resolving the long-term crisis in the area.

Long-term deployment of United States troops supported by the United Kingdom and a dwindling band of allies, trying to maintain an imposed political solution against the increasing hostility of peoples in the region, cannot be regarded as an effective solution. There is no substitute for an internationally sponsored conference of all powers in the region—the middle east equivalent of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, dealing with strict controls of arms exports to the region and with verification for scaling down nuclear, chemical and biological weapons facilities. It could also deal with the creation of a nuclear-free zone throughout the middle east, with thoroughly negotiated international agreements for an elected Palestinian Government, with measures to ensure the security of the pre-1967 Israeli borders, and with the withdrawal of forces from the Lebanon.

Such an international conference, convened by the United Nations, is predicated upon Iraq's complying with the Security Council resolutions. An effective economic blockade together with patient diplomacy is much more likely to bring about longer-term peace and security in the region than the taking of precipitate military action which would turn the whole middle east into a huge Beirut.

There has to be a better way to combat aggression and maintain international law and order at the end of the 20th century. This approach to the crisis, at once practical and philosophical, may not commend itself to some Conservative Members or perhaps to Front-Bench speakers. As United Kingdom Members of Parliament, we do not have the equivalent of the war power resolution of the United States Congress. We cannot decide these issues in the House, but we can indicate a note of caution by voting. We do that not because we are appalled by the aggression of the Ba'athist regime or because we have no concern for human rights and democracy in Kuwait or anywhere else in the middle east, but because we believe that the balance of the argument favours a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

There is a traditional doctrine of the conduct of states which provides a framework for the kind of value judgments that need to be taken in these situations. It is the theological and philosophical doctrine of a just war formulated by St. Augustine and refined by St. Thomas Aquinas. By such a doctrine any war, to be just, must be a last resort with full negotiations beforehand. Success must at least appear possible, the means used must be unavoidable for achieving the goal and those means must be used proportionately and quantitatively so that they do not cause more damage than they are supposed to prevent. They must be proportional to what is wanted. By those criteria I do not think that war in the Gulf can be effective diplomatically or politically or that it can be ultimately justified. For those reasons we shall vote against the Adjournment.

7.52 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): It is with regret that I note in certain quarters of the House and elsewhere some weakening of the resolve to stand up to Saddam Hussein. Some people do not recognise that seeking to appease him is no guarantee of long-term peace in the middle east but a guarantee of further aggression by Saddam Hussein and other like-minded dictators.

In considering the long-term impact, we must recognise that this may well be the last opportunity to deal with Saddam Hussein without nuclear weapons. We are fortunate that in 1981 Israel sought to deactivate the nuclear reactor at Basra. Without that action by the

[Mr. John Marshall]

Israelis we would be facing a dictator with a nuclear capability. Those who are unwilling to face the possibility of war in the middle east are giving encouragement to Saddam Hussein and in three or four years when he has a nuclear capability he may engage in further aggression.

Some hon. Members seek to draw comparisons between the events of 1967 and those of August 1990. In 1967 the United Nations troops left Sinai because Colonel Nasser asked them to do so as a prelude to attacking Israel. In 1967 Jordan attacked Israel. At that time none of Israel's neighbours recognised her right to exist and none had signed a peace agreement with her. In that year Israel was reacting to aggression and the threat of aggression, but Kuwait is a quite different situation.

Kuwait was a small state living at peace with its neighbours. It was a small, inoffensive country and it was attacked by Saddam Hussein to satisfy his aggressive ambitions. He engaged in an act of naked and uncalled-for aggression against a small state. Some people on the international scene seek to establish a link between the situation in Kuwait and the position of the Palestinians. That is quite wrong because the Palestinians are among the chief victims of the invasion of Kuwait. Thousands of expatriate workers in Kuwait suddenly discovered that they had to leave the country. Their remittances, which were essential to the economies of many small towns on the west bank of Israel, disappeared.

I visited Bethlehem in September and the mayor told me that 300 Palestinians from Bethlehem were working in Kuwaiti banks. With the equalisation of the Kuwaiti and Iraqi dinar, their bank accounts were worthless and their remittances to Bethlehem disappeared overnight. Apart from those 300, about 5,000 Palestinians from Bethlehem were working in Kuwait and were sending remittances every month. All that stopped after the events of August 1990 because their remittances, which were important to many Palestinian families, evaporated in the wake of the attack upon Kuwait.

One of the other chief victims of the invasion was the peace process itself. The PLO's initial support of the invasion of Kuwait took the ground from under the feet of people in Israel who had been arguing that there should be discussions between the Government of Israel and the PLO. When I was in Israel, I met members of the peace movement who said that they had been completely gutted by the reaction of the PLO. One of them told me that he had spent five years arguing with his colleagues in Israel for negotiations with the PLO because the PLO had changed. However, its acceptance of events in Kuwait showed that, despite its claims, the PLO has not changed. That has made it much more difficult for people in Israel who seek the path of peace by negotiation.

World calls for a peace conference in the middle east as the price for Saddam Hussein leaving Kuwait will provide an over-large fig leaf to cover Saddam Hussein's withdrawal. Such a conference linked to withdrawal from Kuwait would be used to maximise Saddam Hussein's prestige among the Arabs. Is it right to do that, or is it right to maximise his inconvenience?

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait involved not only aggression against a peace-loving country but, as we hear night after night, it involves pillage, rape, the destruction of Kuwait City and quite unacceptable crimes against humanity. So much damage has been caused that many years and billions of pounds will be needed to enable Kuwait to recover. It is not enough simply to ask Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. Those bloody hands which have destroyed buildings, families and lives must be punished and compensation must surely be paid for the damage that they have done.

If we fail to ensure that Saddam Hussein leaves Kuwait humiliated and defeated, it is almost inevitable that elsewhere in the middle east thoughts will turn to the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against him. Saddam Hussein is an evil man and the soil of Iraq is drenched with the blood of 1 million people which he wantonly shed. No lives have been too precious and all have been affected by this man's evil. Apart from his actions in the Iran-Iraq war, he has indulged in a campaign of institutional barbarism in his own country. He has been willing to use chemical weapons against innocent Kurds and to engage in a campaign of intimidation against his political opponents. Nothing has been too mean or evil for him to contemplate, and the world must recognise that at some stage it will have to stand up to this evil monster, either now or later when he has nuclear weapons. In the 1930s the world could have stopped Hitler when he entered the Rhineland. In the 1990s it must stop Saddam Hussein because of his invasion of Kuwait.

7.58 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): We have heard some significant speeches expressing a wide variety of views, particularly from the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Those outside the House should read my right hon. Friend's speech carefully—it was not a crafty speech, as one hon. Friend suggested, but one of great statesmanship.

I do not consider that I shall be compromised by voting with the Government today. I am a strong believer in the view that politics should cease at the water's edge. A majority of hon. Members have confirmed that our national interest is sustained by a substantial agreement. There will never be consensus in the House, in the country or in the international community, but we must seek substantial agreement on the sensible policy being pursued by the multinational force and the Governments whom it represents.

This is a timely debate. Like many hon. Members, I should prefer a peaceful resolution of the problem. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton said earlier, there is an overwhelming preference for achieving that objective by means of sanctions. But sanctions themselves, unrelated to the threat of force, will achieve nothing. Moral pressure and diplomacy unrelated to the possible use of force will simply be mocked by a man as cynical, manipulative, vicious and tyrannical as Saddam Hussein. We should not eschew the military option or the threat of military force. Military force may not be used, but the threat of it, resolutely applied, will, I hope, be sufficient to bring that regime to heel.

We should not expect our forces to wait indefinitely for sanctions to bring Saddam Hussein down. The multinational force and the coalition would probably not be sustained, economically or politically, for the length of time demanded by some of my hon. Friends. We should speak to our adversaries, but that does not mean that

Saddam Hussein's arguments are necessarily legitimate. Some hon. Members have taken a rather too even-handed view in this debate, as though the man had some justification for his attitude and actions. If negotiation means reaching a point equidistant between two extreme views, I would oppose it. I also oppose the argument that we should throw him something to allow him to save face. That would be the wrong approach.

We have heard today arguments about the concept of a just war. Should all else fail and war break out, military action would not only have been underpinned by the United Nations, which is critical, but it would be a just war. It would not be a war to prop up the oil companies and to maximise their profits. It would not be a war representing some sort of collective blood lust on the part of those prepared to resort to it. It would not be to make the middle east safe for autocracy Gulf-style. It would not be a war to impose western imperialism.

In the past couple of hours we have heard a great deal of nonsense about Kaiser Bill, the re-establishment of white rule and the return to imperialism. The multinational force is not, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) implied, some sort of Anglo-Saxon conspiracy—it is infinitely more broad-based than that rather facile analysis would lead us to believe. Most of those hon. Members who intend to vote with the Government today have been accused of odious hypocrisy, and that is grossly unfair.

The aims of western and Muslim Governments are well known. It is not United Nations policy, but I firmly believe that, whether one uses the word compensation or the more controversial word reparation, that must be pursued, as well as the neutralisation, by military means or otherwise, of Saddam Hussein's offensive and war-making capability. That must be in conjunction with a peace conference to resolve the middle east crisis, and to strengthen the United Nations and international law. It is critical that every effort should be made to prevent the spread of the arms trade, which has been the source of so many problems.

We must keep up military pressure on Iraq. We must sustain the military build-up to give a signal to Saddam Hussein that, militarily as well as politically, his options are running out. We must work hard to prevent the fragmentation of the multinational coalition, and we must work hard to sustain international public opinion and the legitimacy of the United Nations.

Saddam Hussein is clearly successfully manipulating international opinion, using hostages first as a human shield, then releasing them in droplets and, finally, completely. He does not want compromise. He is stalling. He is hoping that the international coalition against him will tire, will be undermined by internal dissent and that the generals and the legions will go home, leaving him with his illegal profits.

Much has happened since our debate a few months ago. Both sets of forces are better prepared, but now there is a balance between them. Any thought of military action before now would have been folly beyond belief. The multinational force and commitment to it is holding, despite pressures from outside and inside. The greatest difference of all is United Nations resolution 673 of 29 November. I have spoken of Saddam Hussein's manipulation of the hostages and how sanctions are being applied with some effect.

If it ever comes to a conflict—I hope to God that it does not—I hope that we shall be successful. If we are not, if Saddam Hussein gains a military victory, should there be a military stalemate or a peaceful solution allowing him to retain his access to the sea, keep his armed forces intact, control Kuwait's oilfields, keep unchanged his country's military structure, expand his nuclear capability, develop his conventional weapons and further build up his conventional forces, that will be a disaster for us.

If Saddam Hussein wins, there will be a gaping international power vacuum. The United States will be completely discredited and will join the Soviet Union as an ex-superpower. It will be a green light to any predatory nation with a spurious territorial claim on a neighbour to settle it by invasion. If he is successful, the United Nations will be fatally weakened and the post cold war security order that has been so patiently set up will be destroyed.

Let us imagine what would happen if Saddam Hussein were successful. Who then in the middle east would stand up to him? It is unlikely that a coalition of Arab states would do so. He would be master of the region. He would be able to control the price of oil. I do not want the world economy to be determined in Baghdad. I do not want the price of oil and its rate of extraction and distribution to be decided by Saddam Hussein. It is not remotely immoral to stand up to Hussein because one is worried about the future of one's national economy and the world economy. Therefore, if war does take place, it will be justifiable. We are all aware of the disastrous consequences of war, but we should not forget the potential disastrous consequences of opting out.

There are many precedents for compensation or reparation. It has been suggested that it would cost more than $60 billion to rebuild Kuwait. How will one replace the destroyed infrastructure or compensate for the loss of life and misery that Saddam Hussein has perpetrated?

Finally, we should be worried about Saddam Hussein's nuclear strike potential. It might be apocalyptic to say that he would have some form of primitive device next week or next month, but to argue that it would take a decade or more would be deliberately to evade the facts. It is obvious that Iraq was planning to build three super guns with the help of Gerald Bull's design. It is obvious that Saddam Hussein has ballistic missiles, largely based on the SCUD —the Al Hussein with a range of 600 km, the Al Abbas with a range of 900 km, the Tammouz, with a satellite launch vehicle, with a possible range of 2,000 km, and the Al Abbad, also with a range of 2,000 km. When those are deployed in significant numbers, the Iraqis have a warhead capability which can take chemical and biological weapons. In a few years they will have nuclear warheads, and then we shall have to hold on to our hats. It is not merely alarmist to say that if war is inevitable it is better earlier than later. I do not want war—I want a peaceful solution.

History has frequently been cited in the arguments both for and against war. Hoare-Laval and Suez have been mentioned today and even the Cuba crisis was cited by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). However, the essence of the Cuba decision was that Khrushchev was faced down by Kennedy—he realised that Kennedy desperately meant it, and so withdrew. The lesson to be learnt is not that suggested by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, but that when western nations are seen to be desperately serious, that is when an adversary will back down.

I shall feel no guilt whatever about voting in the same Lobby as the Government today because in many ways we

[Mr. Bruce George]

are on the same side. I hope very much that the national and international consensus will be sustained, and that diplomacy, sanctions and the threat of military force will be sufficient to bring about the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's forces. If after three, six or nine months it is clear that sanctions have failed, the United Nations will have underpinned action which will be a last resort, but which may ultimately be necessary.

8.10 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): It is always a great pleasure to hear the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) speak about military matters, and I agree with much of what he said. Before I turn to the details of the Gulf problem, I want to let my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs know how much I, as a member of the WEU's defence committee, and my colleagues, I am sure, were delighted at his speech yesterday when he pointed the way to a much more important role for the WEU not only in Europe but outside it.

I was nostalgically interested in the speeches of a number of old colleagues this afternoon. We heard first from my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), whose views are wrong, in my opinion—but his was a powerful speech. I have known him for more than 50 years. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) spoke about the United Nations. I remember his speeches about the UN at the start of, during, and towards the end of the Falklands war —and, oh dear, what a dying fall they had. We heard also from the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), with whose views I also do not agree. But what fine fellows they all are, and were.

The entire Gulf situation has been transformed recently by President Bush's offer to hold talks with the Iraqis. I doubt whether that will prove to be a wise move, and I fear that it is the result of pressures from the American peace movement. We have seen what powerful emotions can be stirred up by the pictures of hostages and their families on our television screens night after night. Those scenes only prove what a menace television can be to the true interests of the nation. The visits by senior politicians to Saddam were a grievous mistake because they only gave him added kudos. Now he realises that there is no more political capital to be made by continuing to hold hostages.

It is difficult to see what there will be to talk about, as Iraq appears to have no intention of withdrawing from Kuwait and making appropriate compensation for the appalling wrong and damage that it has done. I believe that Mr. Bush has felt compelled to offer talks with Saddam because of the growing peace movement in Congress and among the American public, yet if Saddam Hussein still refuses to withdraw, what can Mr. Bush do? He will be in a difficult position if Congress and the American people are unwilling for him to go to war. He must also miss the support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who added so much backbone to the efforts of the United Nations and of Britain.

Saddam will try to prolong talks as long as possible, and will bring in the Palestinians if he can. We must not allow him to get off the hook for that reason, although I accept that the Palestinian problem must be solved as soon as possible after Saddam has been put in his place. If the United States fails to secure Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, Mr. Bush will have allowed aggression to go unpunished, and will also have fatally damaged his personal standing and the position of the United States as a great power. The fact that Iraq may soon have nuclear weapons adds to the awfulness of the prospect.

Iraq is a difficult terrain in which to fight. Many years ago I spent nearly a year in that country as a soldier, and I can tell the House that it is difficult to read a map there, let alone to fight. The climate is most disagreeable in summer and in winter. However, if Saddam does not withdraw, I believe, with the greatest reluctance, that war will become inevitable—awful though that thought may be.

We have some difficulties with our own allies that certainly worry me. Syrian troops are not only deployed alongside British troops in Saudi Arabia but are crawling all over Lebanon and taking over the Christian enclaves. In a sense, the Christians have been thrown to the Syrian wolves, which shows the sadness of realpolitik in foreign affairs.

Can we allow aggression to succeed? I speak as someone who was willing and able to fight at the time of Munich. If appeasement wins, it will be a fearful blow to the United States, Britain, and our allies, and will deal a crushing blow to the United Nations and the Security Council—which for the first time in 40 years, with our alliance with the Soviet Union, has shown itself to be strong and united. Those are the difficult problems which confront the peace party and which people in this country, including some of our clergy, must also be brave enough to face. Therefore, I hope, albeit reluctantly, that our allies will strike and that their campaign will be short, sharp and successful—and as soon as possible after 15 January.

If we do not win this struggle, it will make the Munich agreement seem almost harmless by comparison. Aggression will have paid off, and the future of the world will be jeopardised, as will our new understanding with the Soviets. Saddam will become the strongest person and a hero in the middle east, and Israel—which has been mercifully quiet so far—will probably feel compelled to strike at him. The consequences of that happening are too awful to contemplate both for the middle east and the Arab nations, as well as for ourselves, the United States, and our allies. I repeat that, although I know how horrible war can be, if we cannot bring Saddam down by the middle of January, it will be the only solution to this appalling problem.

8.18 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Unlike the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes), I am thankful that there is televising of war situations, because by instantly knowing what is happening, the public can have at least some, albeit indirect and remote, say in what is done in their name.

I have sat on these Benches for more than 28 years, since the time of the foreign affairs debate that was opened by the late Hugh Gaitskell. I must tell my parliamentary colleagues that I have never been so concerned about anything as I am about what we are debating tonight. Saddam Hussein is in a position to bring down the temple with him. He may be starved of oil and short of munitions,

but he has deep-mined some 300 Kuwait oil wells and is now able to detonate them. The truth is that none of us —scientists, politicians or mining engineers—has any clear idea what may happen when oil wells are deliberately detonated. It is outwith human experience. There is every reason to believe that the emissions of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide will be on a scale that the earth has never seen before. According to the King of Jordan, a radius of about 750 km could be affected. That would be an ecological catastrophe.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves whether our reaction is in proportion, whatever the outrage. If any hon. Member thinks that I am being fanciful, he should consider these words in the official Government newspaper, Al Jumhouriya, on 8 November. It said that Iraq threatened to turn the Arabian peninsula into ashes, and the Saudi oilfields into a sea of fire if attacked.

"The mother of all battles is nearer today."

Only Medina and Mecca will be spared.

"If the fire of aggression is unleashed against Iraq, flames will burn everything in every direction."

The newspaper said that sets of sealed orders existed in case of war.

Is that an idle threat? I fear that it is not. That fact may be uncomfortable, awkward and horrific, but nevertheless that is what we are facing. Any battle will be enormously difficult.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge said that he had experience in a military capacity in Iraq. I am not claiming any great military experience, other than 21 months with the Desert Rats—with the gerbil on my shoulder sleeve, because it was the 7th armoured brigade. Anyone with remote knowledge of tanks, as tank crew, realises how difficult a battle will be in an oilfield. Among other things, have Ministers thought what will happen when tanks have to operate in the vicinity of high-pressure oil pipes? That is a real problem—as is sand.

Last Tuesday, with about 60 or 70 of my parliamentary colleagues—mostly members of the Government party—I attended a lecture given in Committee Room 14 by General Colin Powell. I shall reproduce the question that I asked and General Powell's answer. I told General Powell that, as a member of the minority who did not believe that any successful military victory was to be had, I did not doubt his sincerity in preferring peace to war. I asked him about the figures, with which I have now bored the House on five occasions, from King Hussein's speech about carbon dioxide. That afternoon reference had been made by our Defence Minister to a short, sharp and quick war. I asked General Powell whether he contemplated the use of nuclear weapons. In the hearing of many hon. Members—I do not think I am being inaccurate—General Powell said that he would take my second question first and that he did not contemplate the use of nuclear weapons, but he could not rule out any advice that he might offer to the President of the United States. I think that it would be fair to say that every parliamentary colleague in that room realised that if things were not going right for the Americans and the allied forces, there would be a possibility of nuclear weapons being used. That is horrific. If nuclear weapons were used by white westerners against Arabs, no hon. Member can fail easily to imagine what the reaction in the Arab world would be, even among those who hate Saddam Hussein.

General Powell then turned to my first question. He seemed to accept the King of Jordan's figures, and added that I had better understand that trenches had been dug —incidentally, that has been confirmed by satellites—and that oil is pumped into the trenches, which means that there could be canals of fire. General Powell also said that it would be difficult for his tanks to go through canals of fire. As former national service tank crew, I can only echo that view. Those are the sort of problems that we are up against.

One can say all sorts of things about Saddam Hussein, but I was interested by Sir Brian Urquhart's Montague Burton lecture in Edinburgh. He said that we might find it hard to take the idea of Saddam Hussein as the self-styled champion of the underprivileged, but that that view had a lot of takers. That is an uncomfortable fact, but we have to live with it.

I promise to be brief, and I shall now address my remarks to my own Front-Bench spokesmen—something that I have hardly ever done. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) spoke about the United Nations. In many circumstances I would be bound to agree with him. However, I have a severe streak of doubt. I had the privilege to be chosen by Mr. Speaker to lead the parliamentary delegation to Zaire two weeks ago. We met the Foreign Minister of Zaire. He was full of the fact that earlier in the week he had had a long session with James Baker—Zaire happens to be a member of the Security Council. We asked him why Zaire had lined up with the Americans. He was quite clear that it had nothing whatever to do with rights and wrongs in the middle east. For perfectly understandable civil rights reasons, the Americans had decided that they would not give aid to the hard-pressed Government of President Mobutu, but because Zaire had obliged the Americans in the United Nations, lo and behold, United States aid to Zaire would flow once more.

I suspect that the same may be true of the Ivory Coast and other countries. I was not satisfied with the answer that I was given earlier by the Foreign Secretary in regard to Yemen. The Yemeni people are nearest to the crisis and they have something to lose, but they voted against. It was no good the Foreign Secretary asking me whether I did not know that Cuba is some way from Zaire, as that was no answer. The issue concerns Yemen.

I must also ask my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton about the Labour party conference. For the first time I was sitting in the rows of seats for constituency delegates. I remember the occasion well. My colleagues may correct me if I am wrong, but in the delegate section of the conference it was the general impression that we were concerned about sending air force and naval units for the protection of Saudi Arabia. We were not conscious that we were about attacking Iraq and liberating Kuwait. I suspect that the party goalposts have been changed. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton thinks that I am wrong, doubtless I shall be told, but I do not think that I am.

Angus McGrouther, professor of plastic surgery, who helped to treat soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war, said:

"Casualties likely to arise from a war in the Gulf would rapidly exhaust the facilities available in military hospitals. Even health service facilities to treat burns and major injuries would be fully occupied within days or weeks. Hard choices will need to be made about the priority of different patients."

I wonder whether in the reply to the debate we can be told about the hospitals and treatment.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

I intervened in the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). He is so right. There is confusion between dialogue and appeasement and we must embark upon dialogue.

8.30 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I do not often agree with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but tonight I do. Any war would be ghastly and horrible. Also, I was fortunate enough to listen to General Powell. The House should be indebted to him for giving us such a marvellous dissertation.

The debate serves two purposes. First, it brings home to the British people what a dangerous situation the nation is facing. In fact, I think that it is probably more dangerous than 1939 because the conflict in 1939 was on our doorstep, but this one is a long way away and is not seen as being as immediately dangerous to them. Secondly, the speeches in tonight's debate serve as a signal to Saddam Hussein that we intend to go forward with our allies and bring his aggression to an end. Of course, we all hope that it will be a peaceful conclusion.

The weapons that may be used in the conflict are far worse than those used in the second world war, with the possible exception of those used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The weapons are horrific and I am certain that there will be many casualties in a war such as this. The debate could be entitled, "The Rape of Kuwait". Like most rapes, it cannot be repaired, but compensation can be exacted from those responsible—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Will the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn) continue with his comments?

Sir Alan Glyn: We are all pleased to see that the hostages have been released, but one wonders why they were liberated. Was it to gain time, or was it for some other reason? We do not know. However, I am sure that the House is glad that they have been brought home safely.

It is important that we adhere to the United Nations resolutions. We have to see this conflict through. We have one of the most powerful forces that has ever been raised in a limited area and it has the most devastating weapons. One only hopes that they will not have to be used. The hon. Member for Linlithgow talked about what General Powell said, but we all hope that it will not come to that.

We do not know—my hon. Friend the Minister may know—the comparative strength of the two sides in the military terrain and the weapons that Saddam Hussein has in his arsenal. There are many ways of finding out approximately but when it comes to war it is difficult to estimate the balance. All wars are horrible. Mention has been made of the weapons used in Vietnam. I fought in Vietnam, and it was not very pleasant. However, it was nothing like what I imagine a war in the Gulf would be like.

There must be no possibility of our giving in to the dictator. Although we hope that there will be a peaceful solution, whatever hon. Members think, we have the authority to use whatever means we need to stop Hussein. That is useful. I hope that the means that we have discovered—this international force—can be developed and used not only in Kuwait but anywhere else in the world where it may be necessary. I hope that in any conflict involving factors of this nature it may be used. Britain, together with the Americans and our other allies, could form a force, perhaps with NATO, that could be used as a world peace force. That would be a great step forward. Perhaps the war can bring with it some lessons of international co-operation and working together for the sake of peace.

As many of my hon. Friends have said, we must not allow Saddam Hussein to get away with or gain anything. The damage that he has inflicted and the casualties that he has caused must be paid for. I see no reason why he should not be forced to pay for them. This is not because of a greed for oil or the profits made by oil companies. However, hon. Members on both sides have said that oil is essential in this century whether it be for the peasant in India, the factory in Leeds or elsewhere. We must not allow Hussein to become a sort of king of the middle east able, as one hon. Member said, to dictate the price of oil.

Whatever the conflict brings, we have to look at the aftermath and what is to be done. Obviously the problems in Israel and Jordan have to be solved and we have to encourage the Arabs to work out a peaceful solution to the problems in the middle east after we have accomplished our task. I hope that the international armed forces will be able to maintain their determination. However, armies do not like sitting doing nothing. One danger is that Saddam Hussein may realise that our armed forces are perhaps getting bored. I hope that we shall be able to find a peaceful solution rather than having to go to war.

Sir Jim Spicer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The unfortunate interruption just now is bad enough in itself. However, when five hon. Members applaud such action and, thereby, encourage it, one can envisage the headlines tomorrow morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The headlines are made larger by points of order of that nature.

8.38 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): There is no doubt that my position is the same as that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and as expressed in the early-day motion. I am opposed to a war in the Gulf and I am specifically deeply disturbed at the danger that we face as we give a blank cheque to an American-led assault some time after 15 January. I shall be voting against the Adjournment because I do not want in any way, by silence, omission or vote, to give any encouragement to the Government to think that they can continue propping up American policy and carrying on a long tradition of being dragged along in the wake of the United States like some poodle yapping its chorus of support for American interests round the globe.

I profoundly disagree with those Members who, however sincerely they hold the view, say that the crisis is not about oil. From the opinion polls in Britain and in America, there is not the slightest doubt that the overwhelming majority of people realise that this is about oil, wealth and power. It is not a defence of a small country from some nasty, oppressive neighbour. Over the past 40 years, we have seen endless examples of aggression and of crossing borders which, in some instances, have been supported by the United States. In some instances, the United States has acted with our complicity, as was the

case with Suez. It ill behoves the United States now to adopt the mantle of an international judge dispensing peace and brotherly love; it is a cover for its own financial interests.

Early in the evolution of the conflict, I was especially struck by a statement from the Iranian news agency, which is not a body with which I normally find myself in agreement. The agency said that Frankenstein's monster had turned on his creator. The Iranians were reminding us that Saddam Hussein, his Government and his state have been a creature of western interests for a long time. Evidence has been provided by King Hussein of Jordan that when Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party came to power in Iraq it had the support of the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA gave Saddam Hussein death lists of activists, trade unionists and members of the communist party because it saw Saddam Hussein as an instrument through which to destroy the Iraqi communist party—which he did with total ruthlessness.

Throughout the war between Iraq and Iran there was wholehearted support by the United States—sometimes covert and sometimes not so covert—for Iraqi aggression against Iran. When Iraq launched an unprovoked assault against Iran, where was the condemnation by the United Nations? The United Nations was prevented from acting by America's veto. America assisted both through the supply of arms and through the passing to the Government of Iraq of spy satellite photographs showing the disposition of Iranian forces.

I can imagine what Saddam Hussein felt when he decided to invade Kuwait. He must have thought, "They did not object when I did it to Iran, so why should they object when I do it to Kuwait?" That is the logic. In one sense, Saddam Hussein is a creature of the west. He has paid his dues to the west and he has carried out the interests of the west in attacking Iran when we saw Iran as the great danger. Now he has turned on his creator.

Even with Saddam Hussein's more recent abomination —the assaults on his own Kurdish minority, when his gas weapons killed them by the thousands—the United States threatened to use its veto in the United Nations to prevent it from condemning Iraq. One of the western satellites and puppets of the imperial interests of the United States is embarrassing its creator, turning on its creator and getting too big for its boots. We can only understand the debate about what has been happening over the past five months when we see matters in that international perspective.

I was amazed today. I listened to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and, for the first time in my life, I agreed with every sentence that he uttered. I wished that he had gone one sentence further and said that the logic of his position would lead him to vote against the Adjournment, and that he would join us in the Lobby tonight. However, he made a fine speech which pointed out the nonsense and the dangers that we now face.

My right hon. Friend reminded the House that sanctions would need a year to work. He reminded us that the sanctions would destroy 43 per cent. of the gross national product of Iraq, which would be a massive assault. Such an impact would be likely to lead Saddam Husseim to withdraw. Yet we are told by America, which is exerting pressure at the United Nations, that it wants clearance for an attack on Iraq and that it wants to be able to move. Why is that? It is because there is an insufficient domestic base of support for George Bush's policies. American public opinion does not support the prospect of war and the support is eroding.

We are told by independent commentators that President Bush could not get a vote for war through his House of Representatives. It is nice to think that the House of Representatives would at least be allowed a vote on whether to go to war. I sometimes think that this House has one or two things to learn from the procedures in other Parliaments.

We are also told that the Americans must move because sanctions are not working quickly enough. Why is that? The reason is that American corporations are leading the sanctions-busting. We are told by the President of the United States that we may have to lose the lives of young people in our armed forces who are stationed in the middle east because the Americans cannot impose the discipline of sanctions on their own multinational corporations. Why should young people from this country be butchered in a war that is the consequence of the failure of the Americans to carry the support for sanctions of their own business community? We are supporting sanctions. Why cannot President Bush get his own large, multinational corporations to ensure that the sanctions work? It is an obscenity that, because corporate America will not co-operate, we are now under accelerating pressure for a military solution in the Gulf. That is why there has been pressure on the United Nations.

What a weasel-worded way of proceeding there has been. The Americans have not had the courage to put down a motion saying, "We want authorisation for a military strike against Iraq." They have used the term "other means" so that they can get the support of Gorbachev and of others. While the Government here can say, "This does open the way for the use of a military strike", Gorbachev can say, "It means that the Americans will do everything but launch a military strike." Let us have some honesty about the proposal.

We know full well that if America had proposed a resolution using the words "military force", it would have been vetoed. The weaselly evasion has dominated much of the debate, with people saying one thing while meaning another. That is why I regret the fact that we shall not have a specific and clear vote tonight. Why do not the Government have the courage to table a motion calling for support for an armed strike after 15 January? The reason is that they do not want to fracture the fragile alliance. They want to minimise opposition and they want to allow hon. Members to say only, "I am opposed to that."

I should like to think that, when the Secretary of State for Defence speaks tonight, he will have the honesty and integrity to say that if the House votes for the Adjournment, when he is talking about it in public he will say, "We won the backing of the House of Commons for military action after 15 January." If he is not prepared to say that on the Floor of the House, he has no right to say it outside the House either nationally or at international conferences. We will press him on that point.

Many Members who are undecided about how to vote tonight want to know how the Government will interpret their vote. Let us hear how the Government will interpret the vote before hon. Members go into the Lobby. I am prepared to give way now to the Secretary of State for Defence if his integrity pressures him to feel that he wants to intervene to make the Government's position clear.

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

What is the real reason for war? It is not to uphold the law or to defeat aggression, and it is certainly not to build a new world order. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield said, war will be about re-establishing the old imperial order of the 19th century. With the weakened position of the Soviet Union, the imperial powers seek to regain some of the ground that they have lost. If any of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench doubt that—and I was much moved by the oratory and charm of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—I must point out that *The Wall Street Journal* carries more influence in the White House than Labour Members do when they speak in the House. My right hon. Friend should read *The Wall Street Journal*, which is the paper of capitalism. It is honest about its aim. It does not talk about defending poor Kuwait or about defeating Iraqi aggression, but about re-establishing western control over vital international resources.

We are told now that we shall prop up America in this campaign. We can look back over decades of aggression led by America and over decades of the Americans breaking international law. We think of the illegal invasion of Cuba in 1961, of the illegal complicity in the assassination of President Lumumba in the Congo, which is now Zaire, and of the invasion of the Dominican Republic to overthrow a democratically elected Government who were barely social democratic, but who were perceived as a threat by the United States. I refer also to the illegal bombing of Cambodia, the assassination of 6,000 people in South Vietnam by the CIA because they were believed to be agents of North Vietnam, the invasion of Grenada, and the arming of Israel in 1982—a massive increase in American armaments to prepare Israel for its illegal invasion of Lebanon. There was no condemnation of that. When we saw America condemned by the world court, where was its defence of the rule of international law? When the world court ruled against it for the illegal mining of the harbours of Nicaragua, it refused to comply with the judgment. Those people are not fit to determine how the world is organised.

There is no denying that Saddam Hussein is a vile, despicable and brutal leader, and I look forward to his overthrow by his own people. However, in terms of global politics he is the local mugger on the block. One does not bring in the local mafia to deal with the mugger on the block. America's record over the decades is infinitely worse. It is a record of sustained oppression. My vote tonight will demonstrate that the people who sent me here did not intend that I should simply play the role that has been part of British politics in the past 40 years—tagging along with America.

It is striking that the nations that have built successful and dynamic economies have held back from the conflict. The two leading protagonists, America and Britain, think that they can easily divert the attention of their peoples from their mismanagement of their economies to foreign adventures. That will not work. It will not be the quick surgical strike that people are talking about. It is the gravest threat that the world has faced since the Vietnam war was at its height.

I urge all hon. Members to make their commitment clear. They cannot go into the Aye Lobby and argue that it was a vote for peace in the Gulf. It is a vote to carry on the policy of subordinating Britain and its interests to the United States of America, and it is time we said no.

8.51 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I promised my colleagues that I would not take too much time because one or two other hon. Members want to speak.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) that we should be debating another motion because our position at the end of this debate will be farcical. The Government opened the debate by moving,

"That this House do now adjourn."

When the Division is called, the Government will vote against their own motion. If they vote for the Adjournment of the House, the rest of tonight's business will fall. People outside simply do not understand the procedures that the House of Commons adopts on such great occasions. It would have been far better to debate a motion which could have been the subject of an amendment. We would then have known clearly where we stood.

I voted in the Aye Lobby in the September recall. I shall explain what I explained to my constituency Labour party on the Thursday night following that vote. I supported the actions that had been taken until that time. I made it clear that, if the position changed, I reserved my right to change my view. The position has changed. It has moved on dramatically, and we are now on the brink of war.

Whatever else may be said, I am the first to concede that, in a moderate speech today, the Foreign Secretary made it abundantly clear to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that the Government considered that they had a mandate to take the country to war without further reference to the House of Commons. That is untenable and I will not support it, and I urge my colleagues not to support it. We should not place the Labour party in such a position.

The Secretary of State for Defence will no doubt talk about the need to preserve the coalition. The coalition has a far better chance of survival through the operation of sanctions than it will have if we go to war. What is the composition of forces presently in the Gulf? They are from Syria, Egypt—even some mujaheddin—Britain, France and America. No one can tell me that the Syrian forces are going to go to war. The Egyptians will not go to war. Francois Mitterrand is already making it clear that there are serious doubts whether the 5,000 French troops in the Gulf will be committed to conflict. The coalition will not survive; it will flounder on war alone. The Secretary of State for Defence had better understand that the best chance of survival for the coalition is the imposition and preservation of sanctions, not war.

In an earlier intervention I asked whether there are contingency plans in the Ministry of Defence for the reintroduction of conscription. No one has given thought to the continuing troop commitment in the Gulf even after the conflict is over. We have seen the continuing commitment that we need in the Falklands. We have commitments in Ireland. We will continue with commitments in the Gulf states after the conflict is over. No one has given any thought to that question. We have had no comment and no analysis of the required continuing commitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said that he was worried about being accused of hypocrisy for voting with the Government. I do not tag any of my colleagues with the label of hypocrisy. I give them the credit of knowing exactly what they are doing, just as I shall know exactly what I am doing when I go into the Aye Lobby tonight.

I finish with the same comment as I made to the parliamentary Labour party. An allegation about appeasement has been thrown about left, right and centre. That charge is laid by those who make the fundamental blunder of believing that the opposite of war is appeasement. The opposite of war is not appeasement; it is peace. The Labour party, of all parties, should give peace a chance.

8.57 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): The question is not whether we should allow Saddam Hussein to get away with it. It is not whether anyone approves the invasion of Kuwait, or whether we support the United Nations, or whether armed force should ever be used to enforce United Nations resolutions. The question is whether the time has now come—or will come in January—for armed force to be used to enforce United Nations resolutions about Kuwait.

It was clear from the speech of the Foreign Secretary that, in his opinion, the time for war is close. He told us that war should be a last resort, that United Nations resolution 678 is not a call to arms, and that the Government are working for a peaceful outcome. He also told us that sanctions are having an effect, but then he went on to tell us why he thought war was justified. He gave us four reasons.

The first is that Kuwait is being dismantled piece by piece. The House will remember the American officer who explained the destruction of a village in Vietnam by saying that the American army destroyed it in order to save it from the communists.

Secondly, the Foreign Secretary told us that murder, torture and brutality are commonplace in Kuwait. Of course they are—they are commonplace in Iraq and in many other countries, especially in the middle east—but let us not pretend that we are going to war in defence of human rights.

Thirdly, the Foreign Secretary told us that Iraq is improving its defences. Of course it is—what else would we expect? That might have been an argument for going to war last August or next August after sanctions have affected the Iraqis' ability to defend themselves, but it is the worst possible argument for going to war in December or January when their defences are at their best.

Fourthly, the Foreign Secretary told us that it has taken a long time to establish collective security, that collective security has a subscription, and that the subscription is collective action. We all agree with that, but economic sanctions are collective action and that is a subscription to collective security.

The point is that economic sanctions take time. It was clear from the Foreign Secretary's speech that the Government are not willing to allow enough time for sanctions to take effect. That is why when I vote tonight I shall be voting not against the United Nations but against the Government and their rush to war.

9 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who has now left the Chamber. I have yet to hear a more anti-American speech or a worse diatribe against one of our oldest allies. The hon. Gentleman uttered not one word about the plight of Kuwait and the Kuwaitis. That country has been invaded by Iraq and dominated by it and its population is tyrannised by the forces of Iraqi occupation. If our history as a nation is anything to go by, we should understand what that can lead to if it is not firmly addressed.

The United States and this country have taken an admirable lead in the United Nations to garner world-wide support for the actions that have been taken, first, in introducing sanctions and, secondly, to back that up with military forces which are designed, initially and, I hope, eventually, to persuade Saddam Hussein that he must withdraw from Kuwait without reservation, or face the consequences—consequences that none of us want to face. War is a dirty and distressing business and those who took part in the second world war and other wars since will be fully aware of the death and destruction caused by it. We do not know, because we have not used them, what destructive capacity our sophisticated weaponry now has and we do not appreciate what that will cost in lives.

It is all very well to say that we can leave sanctions indefinitely, and that at some stage in the future, perhaps, Saddam Hussein will withdraw because he has been obliged to do so by the stranglehold exerted on his country by the world. Can Kuwait and its population wait that long? If we were in a similar situation, would we have wanted that? In the second world war, when the forces of Nazi Germany surrounded us, would we willingly have allowed the United States to say that it would wait and see how long the United Kingdom could hold out in the hope that something would be resolved? Instead, it came to our rescue with military aid and then with its army, air force and navy and, together, the great allied forces of the west pushed back the Nazi threat and exterminated it. As we now appreciate, had we been a little more resolute to start with, that destructive war, which cost 50 million lives, might not have come to pass.

The hon. Member for Brent, East, among others, suggested that the issue is all about oil, and there is an element of truth there, in that oil is the basis of our civilisation. The United Kingdom need not worry overmuch about an adequate supply of oil, but the vast majority of countries, particularly those in the third world, owe their very existence to a supply of relatively cheap oil. If, at any stage, one country obtains a stanglehold on oil supplies, we shall not be affected half so much as the economies of the third world, which will be destroyed. Those who have the third world's interests at heart had better understand that only by resolving the Gulf crisis can we hope for the third-world countries to make anything of themselves in terms of economic viability.

The conduct of the west during the crisis has been very good. I sincerely hope that there will not be an armed conflict. However, if it comes to that, I am certain that our officers and generals, with their military expertise, in conjunction with our allies and the United States—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about the men?"]—and the men, of

[Mr. Roger King]

course, all of whom are professionals in this country—will all discharge their duties with outstanding vigour and determination.

The exercise of armed conflict will naturally have been considered by the planners. I hope that, at least initially, we shall fall back on the role of the air forces of the allies to conduct the initial operation against Iraq before committing any ground forces. It is extremely difficult from this position to second-guess how our military men will plan such an exercise, and we hope that it will not come to pass. Clearly, we hope for a gradual escalation which will give the time—all the time—for Saddam Hussein to reflect and to make some arrangement whereby he can withdraw even after a conflict has started.

Any conflict is extraordinarily distressing in this modern day and age. We have got used to having a long period of peace in this country, and the prospect of our military men coming home in coffins is not something that we wish to consider likely in any way. But nor are the consequences of allowing a dictator—by any standards, and by all hon. Members, Saddam Hussein is regarded as a wholly unacceptable leader—to have his way in any shape or form as a result of the action that he has taken. Only by standing absolutely resolutely with our allies can we impress upon Saddam Hussein the consequences of his remaining in occupation of Kuwait. If there is any smattering of dissent or derision about the west's stance so far, that can only encourage him to continue his occupation and will bring the threat of conflict ever nearer.

9.6 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Shortly after the first emergency debate on the Gulf crisis in September, I went out to Iraq with my hon. Friends the Members for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry). We were the first hon. Members to visit Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait, and we were members of an international peace mission with two objectives—first, to make representations for the release of hostages and, secondly, to try to establish whether there was any basis for a peaceful settlement to the crisis. In the context of the first objective, I am sure that the whole House, the country and the world will welcome last Thursday's announcement of the release of hostages. It now looks as though many families will have a happy Christmas and will be reunited with their loved ones who have been forcibly separated from them for many months.

Last Thursday's announcement was a vindication of the efforts made by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) and my colleagues who took part in the mission of which I was a member. We were subjected to a great deal of criticism, vilification and verbal abuse before we even left this country on that peace mission. In September, as now, there was far too much talk of war and those who wished to speak of peace were treated almost like lunatics or traitors.

Despite all the criticism, our stance was justified. We tried to comunicate with the Iraqi authorities rather than toeing the line of our critics, who claimed that the best way to proceed was to refuse to communicate and to seek to isolate the enemy. Now even the Americans have come round to the idea of talking to Saddam Hussein, and that is also to be welcomed, but I am dismayed—indeed, I am appalled—that the British Government seem simply to parrot the American line that talks should not develop into constructive dialogue and constructive dialogue should not be allowed to develop into meaningful negotiations even though negotiations are explicitly referred to in item 3 of United Nations resolution 660.

The only hope of peace in Kuwait, Iraq and, indeed, throughout the middle east is to ensure that the talks develop into dialogue and that dialogue develops into meaningful negotiations. We must try to obtain a peaceful settlement with the consistent implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. We must consider the wider region with Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Yet instead, the American and British Governments seem hell bent on using United Nations resolution 678 as a mandate for war, even though there is no explicit reference in that resolution either to war or to the use of force. The resolution explicitly refers to the use of "all necessary means" of implementing other United Nations resolutions.

It could be argued that the use of force may not be necessary, particularly if more effort is put into finding a diplomatic solution. In other words, non-violent means have not been exhausted. As other hon. Members have said, we must give sanctions more time to work. But above all, genuine negotiations must be entered into—we must not simply rely on a massive military build-up which could escalate into chemical, biological and even nuclear warfare, with horrendous consequences for people in the area and possibly for many of our constituents, too.

Today is almost certainly our last chance to debate and vote on this issue before the mid-January deadline, and it may be the last chance to do so before the outbreak of war. If there is no vote today, the Government will claim a unanimous mandate from Parliament for declaring war and, in effect, pronouncing a death sentence on many people, including innocent men, women and children, and many of our constituents who are out there in the armed forces.

It was interesting to note at Prime Minister's Question Time that in response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) we received no assurance from the Prime Minister that he would rule out the possibility of conscription. I say this to the Defence Secretary: I would support any young constituent of mine who tore up and burned a conscription paper. I say that to the warmongers in this House, the White House, or wherever they may lurk. Why do they not ever so bravely volunteer their own services and go out to the Gulf themselves instead of sending young people out there to be killed or maimed for life?

I believe that a vote for the Government today may be interpreted as a vote for war; a vote against them will certainly be a vote for peace.

9.14 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I was about to say that I would be brief, but I think that I shall have to be!

First, let me tell the Secretary of State for Defence how grateful I am to him and his Ministers for the kind assistance that they have given a constituent of mine, Miss Jacqueline Noble, who will now be able to go ahead with her wedding in the Old Kirk in Kilmacolm on Friday. She is to marry Signalman Steven Alexander, who is due to go to the Gulf. When I intervened, the Secretary of State kindly allowed the young lad to come up to Scotland to marry his fiancée. I sincerely hope that he and all his comrades in the British armed forces will return unharmed from Saudi Arabia when Saddam Hussein withdraws from Kuwait.

As I think the Secretary of State knows, I tried to intervene in his speech in the September debate. I now seek an assurance from him—if I can attract his attention—that our medical facilities in Saudi Arabia are, in his opinion and that of his officials, entirely adequate to meet any contingency.

I have argued the case for sanctions all along. I said earlier, when I intervened on the Foreign Secretary, that, even if sanctions take a year or 18 months to inflict a crippling blow on Saddam Hussein's evil regime, that will be infinitely preferable to the sacrifice of the life of a single British service man—or any service man—in that troubled part of the world.

In that connection, I was heartened to read what James Schlesinger had to say in *The Guardian* on 5 December. Mr. Schlesinger, a former CIA director, said:

"The embargo, backed up by a naval blockade, is the most successful ever achieved aside from time of war. Early on, it was officially estimated that it would require a year for the sanctions to work. It now appears to be working more rapidly than anticipated."

Just three weeks ago in the United Nations building in New York, in the presence of several hon. Members, Ms. Marjetta Rasi, the Finnish ambassador to the Security Council and chairman of the Security Council's sanctions committee, told me—and other members of a small delegation to the UN—

"In over 40 years of UN peace-keeping missions, this is the first time sanctions have ever been effective."

I dissociate myself from the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who referred to sanctions-busting by American firms. Ms. Rasi told me that sanctions were working, and that the Iraqi economy was being crippled. That, in my view, is how we must proceed.

While in America, I paid a weekend visit to some friends in a small town in rural New Jersey. Regrettably, the inhabitants of that small town to whom I spoke were much better informed of the implications of a military strike against Saddam Hussein than others to whom I have spoken in my constituency and elsewhere in Scotland. I support what was said by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath): the savage and dreadful consequences of a military strike have not been spelt out by the Government to the British people.

When I was in America, I read in the newspapers and heard on television and radio how the Catholic bishops there had sent a letter to President Bush warning against military intervention and arguing for continued adherence to sanctions. A couple of days later the Episcopalian bishops sent an identical letter to the President. We in the United Kingdom should be doing the same—supporting sanctions, even though they may take a long time to take effect.

There would be many casualties in a war against Saddam Hussein. In addition to the dreadful slaughter, the United Nations would suffer. When Saddam's troops have withdrawn, the border between Iraq and Kuwait and between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia must be policed by a blue-helmeted UN peacekeeping force made up of soldiers from countries throughout the world. Our first priority must be to support sanctions.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ron Brown: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is a vital debate. It is about life and death, peace and war. Is it possible to extend it in some way, in view of the number of hon. Members who would like to speak but who have not been called?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Would that I had the power to do so.

9.21 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): This is the third occasion on which we have dealt with the subject of the Gulf. Throughout Opposition Members have sought opportunities to debate all aspects of the crisis. The previous two debates were at our request, and we shall continue to press the Government to provide time for debate, particularly if there is a change in the nature of the crisis, for better or worse. We shall do that regardless of arrangements for the recess or anything else.

In this debate we have moved our attention to the prospect of the use of force as a consequence of United Nations resolution 678. That resolution does not require the use of force. Indeed, it explicitly excludes its use until after 15 January. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, the date was included as a condition for Soviet support. How much optimism was invested in that by the Soviet Union is not clear, but it has afforded the United States an opportunity to describe the extent of the military capability in the Gulf and to seek a peaceful solution.

During a visit that I paid to the Gulf, to visit our troops and to obtain briefings, it was made abundantly clear to me and to those who accompanied me that the extent of the military presence was such that the leader of any country who tempted a response, an attack, from such a military presence would be grossly irresponsible and could not be considered fit to be in charge of a country.

The task of Secretary of State Baker is clear. When he sees Saddam Hussein, he must explain in graphic detail what 2,500 aircraft could do in concerted air strikes in 60 hours. He must describe the damage that would be inflicted on the runways of air bases by Tornados going in at below 200 ft and dropping cluster bombs. Aircraft in hardened shelters are no use if there are no runways from which they can take off. Mr. Baker must point out that all the main roads and supply routes to provide logistical support will be attacked in similar fashion. Saddam Hussein must be informed that all known depots and munitions factories will be attacked. He must be reminded that the locations of chemical weapons plants are known to the allies and those plants will be destroyed. He will be committing hundreds of thousands of his fellow countrymen into a battle where they will be denied supply spares and many forms of reinforcement within hours of hostilities commencing.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

The war between Iran and Iraq was a land war, with only a small part being played by the air forces. In any Gulf war, the 500,000 allied troops and the presence of carriers, frigates, destroyers and minesweepers in such numbers means that the armoured divisions will advance with air cover and the amphibious landings will be supported by massive air back-up. Saddam Hussein must be left with no excuses about the extent of his ignorance of the dreadful effect of the horrendous arsenal that has been gathered in Arabia; the implications must be brought home to him.

I regret that in some ways we seem to be personalising the issue, but we must recognise that we are talking about an absolute ruler, a fascist dictator who, like the emperor in the children's story, is not used to being told that he has no clothes. Saddam Hussein is the sort of person who is more likely to shoot the messenger and ignore the message. We must get the message across, through James Baker, that there cannot be any doubt that, after the meeting on 25 July attended by ambassador Ms. Glaspie, the United States is still equally concerned about an Iraqi invasion. At that time, the American ambassador to Iraq left an impression that the Americans would not object to an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. That is no longer the case, and it is abundantly clear that Mr. Baker has to go to Iraq and make certain that Saddam Hussein understands the consequences of military action.

Such a policy has been called the war option, and this morning's editorial in *The Independent* said that it might be the lesser of two evils. I totally disagree. War will unleash a conflict of unparalleled ferocity, which forces us to consider as paramount the economic option.

A number of claims have been made for sanctions. The record of sanctions is a mixed one. Two recent studies referred to in Susan Willett's book "Economic Implications of the Gulf Crisis" suggest that in the study of 100 incidences of sanctions since 1914, examined by Haufbauer and Scholt, 36 have been successful. A more recent work by Margaret Doxey of Chatan house suggests that there is little evidence to show that sanctions have achieved their objectives, and in the majority of cases have had the opposite effect to that desired by those advocating their imposition.

The key to the success of sanctions has to be the maintaining of an international consensus. That is why the Labour party has continually argued that all sanctions must first secure United Nations approval. However, greater assistance must be given to the front-line states. Jordan is likely to lose $2 billion, Egypt is likely to lose $9 billion and Turkey is likely to lose $5 billion in the 12 months up to August next year. Steps must be taken to ensure that we keep a hold on oil prices because, although the dependence of the world's poorest countries on oil is less than that of the first world, their ability to pay for the meagre amount of oil they consume is far less. The significance of oil in the distribution of food in famine-stricken sub-Saharan Africa cannot be exaggerated. It is not enough for oil-rich countries to make payments to help those third world nations; they will have to be more sensitive to the needs of the recipients, certainly more sensitive than organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World bank have been so far.

Mr. Healey: Is my hon. Friend aware that there was an extraordinarily successful example of sanctions, applied in 1956 against aggression by two large European states and by Israel, at Suez? The mere threat of American financial sanctions against Britain produced the withdrawal of all three armies within a week.

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, whom I have heard make that point before. I was not suggesting that sanctions will not work. I think that they can work, but we must make it clear that they must be applied on the basis of sustaining the international consensus, part of which involves securing the rights of the poorer nations which will make the biggest sacrifice during this lengthy process which, we are all agreed, will take longer than six months. I should like to think that the sort of sanctions imposed in 1956, which secured their objective in a matter of days, could have been imposed in this case —but I fear that this time they will take somewhat longer.

Mr. Healey: With great respect to my hon. Friend, I must point out that oil sanctions are robbing Iraq of 90 per cent. of its hard currency, which it requires to buy spares for its aircraft and to buy a large number of other items of critical importance. The analogy is a very close one.

Mr. O'Neill: The imposition of sanctions is not an easy option. It will require major sacrifices from the sanctionists, which are often countries that are already impoverished. It will require a degree of solidarity that becomes more difficult to sustain as their burden increases. The United Nations provision for humanitarian aid could be used as an excuse for undermining the economic embargo; and all the while Iraq can be adjusting to the privations and could be perfecting its weapon systems.

A recent article in a defence studies booklet by Martin Navias makes it clear that, without foreign assistance, the Iraqis would probably be incapable of producing nuclear weapons within five years. If they were to receive the sort of scientific assistance that they would require, they could at best produce nuclear weapons within 24 to 36 months. So hon. Members who suggest that we are on the verge of nuclear attack from Iraq are at best grossly exaggerating and at worst indulging in irresponsible scaremongering.

If sanctions were to fail, the United Nations would have failed the greatest ever test of its authority. At a time when it is unencumbered by cold war diversions, and when all the permanent members are seeking to work in concert, and when unprecedented backing has been given to sanctions, the price of failure with sanctions is almost too high to contemplate. Nevertheless, we must persist with them—they must be given a chance.

Those of us who urge this course must recognise that at the end of the day—I shall not say when—we may well have to use force of arms. I agree with my hon. Friends who have argued the case for persisting with sanctions, but I also believe that if sanctions are not seen to work we may have to resort to force of arms. Some of my hon. Friends have consistently opposed the deployment of troops and have abjured the use of arms, and they are entitled to their point of view, but I must tell my other hon. Friends that there may well come a time—I hope later, or better still never—when we must recognise the possibility of using force.

Mr. Harry Ewing: How will my hon. Friend judge whether sanctions are working?

Mr. O'Neill: I will decide that when the United Nations committee reports to the effect that they are not working. The UN is responsible for the administration and control of the sanctions, and it produces reports on their effectiveness. We have given the UN that authority; now we must trust its judgment in the matter.

I do not want to hear people talking about war starting immediately after 15 January. However, for the people of Kuwait, the war started on 2 August. Hostages graphically describe the consequences of the invasion and annexation and the reduction of the state of Kuwait to a heap of rubble. The flouting and defiance of international law cannot be tolerated. I remind my hon. Friends that bad cases do not make good law.

Iraq already owes vast sums. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said that about 95 per cent. of Iraq's income comes from oil. Its oil revenues are $13 billion and it has continuing expenditure of $24 billion. That does not take account of accumulated foreign debt of more than $80 billion. The bill for the post Iran war reconstruction has been estimated at $230 billion. It is little wonder that in February, at the Arab co-operation council, Saddam Hussein announced that he was seeking not only a moratorium on the Gulf states' wartime loans but an immediate grant of $30 billion.

The claims and counter claims of the Gulf states and Iraq will have to be dealt with in the kind of negotiations which have been mentioned in the debate and which follow the last and often unmentioned part of the United Nations first resolution.

As I have said, as the cost of continued failure to resolve this crisis becomes better known and better understood, the options seem to close. The options are economic sanctions with their likelihood of impoverishment, the force of arms and the certain loss of life and devastation. Against all of those, the case for diplomatic action remains unchallenged. The continued military presence represents only one stated aspect of the threat. The capability is there for all to see, and we all know what would happen if arms were used.

If the Iraqis believe that the Kuwaitis have stolen $24 billion from the Rumaila oilfield, they should go through international arbitration procedures and have their case examined. There must be no talk of giving Iraq the oilfields in order to get Saddam Hussein to leave peaceably. That would merely legitimise Iraqi aggression and place Kuwait under permanent threat of subsequent invasion.

In recognition of his isolation and of the threat to his people and to the middle east, let Saddam Hussein withdraw his troops and let talks begin. The United Nations is the place to resolve these disputes. That is why we have said again and again at the Dispatch Box, at our party conference and at every opportunity to communicate with the public that the support of the world community must be sought before any action is taken.

I repeat what I said at the beginning of my speech, that the Opposition expect an opportunity to debate this issue if conditions deteriorate before 15 January. The House must have an opportunity to have its views heard. The UN-sponsored allies have shown their intent and willingness to deploy troops and the UN has shown support for military action if all else fails. Iraq cannot be certain about the timing of such action. Therefore, the threat of military action is greatest in its uncertainty. The answer is in the hands of Iraq. It cannot say that it has not been warned or that it has not been given a chance to arrive at a peaceful settlement. Let us hope that Iraq chooses the peaceful way.

9.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): This has been a grave and sombre debate, wiith hon. Members on both sides of the House expressing strong feelings. It was admirably introduced by measured speeches from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

The issues with which I want to start are those on which the House is united. The first is that, although not all hon. Members mentioned it, all deplore the aggression against Kuwait and the behaviour of Saddam Hussein's regime with the atrocities and cruelty that are only now being more fully revealed to us with the return of some of the hostages.

Today's debate has been about what means might best achieve the end of that unacceptable situation. But before I address those matters, I want to mention another issue on which I know that the House is united. In that connection, perhaps I might be excused a personal comment. Like my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and many others in the House, I have been involved in this issue since 2 August, in my case in the particularly direct sense that we had a non-combatant military training team in Kuwait at the time of the Iraqi invasion. I know that the House will share something of the joy that I feel, which is felt throughout the nation, and most of all in the families of those concerned, at the welcome developments of the past week.

Another jumbo is on its way at this minute, which I hope will arrive at midnight tonight. The House may recall that, through the medium of the broadcasts of our proceedings, I assured our non-combatant military training team that we would never forget it. We never have. It has been a constant concern for us, and I pray now that that anguish has at last been ended.

Because of our experiences so far, we very much endorse what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said about the importance of counselling. There is the joy of return, but the agony, anguish and difficulty of readjustment is not over. My right hon. Friend will know the steps that have been taken by the Government, the voluntary agencies and the Gulf support group to help those returning from, in many cases, quite appalling experiences, with counselling and information packs, and the ready presence of the Foreign Office and the Department of Social Security, with help with housing if necessary.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) for his tribute to the diplomatic service. There have been many brickbats flying around suggesting that the diplomatic service in Baghdad and, initially, in Kuwait may not have coped as competently as it should. Given all the unexpected difficulties that they faced, my right hon. Friend was right to express admiration and respect for our ambassador, Mr. Weston, Larry Banks, our consul in Kuwait, and Mr. Harold Walker, our ambassador in Baghdad, and his team for the way in which they coped with such a difficult situation.

[Mr. Tom King]

Despite our joy at the return of the hostages, the agony of the Kuwaiti people continues. We have seen—I believe that it is true—the first attempt to extinguish a member of the United Nations since the founding of that body in 1945. There has been torture, murder and looting and we are now hearing the reports of our returned hostages. In addition, those who sought to escape from that appalling situation suffered the ultimate indignity of being stripped of their national identity and papers as they fled from the intimidation and terror in their country.

That suffering is not exclusively confined to Kuwait. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup fairly referred to Jordan as a country which has suffered much in the side winds of this appalling situation. I can confirm that the Government recognise the difficulties faced by the King and the Government of Jordan and we are doing all we can to see what further help can be given to them.

Another echo sounded in the debate was picked up by the right hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and for Gorton. I refer to the role of the United Nations on a scale quite beyond previous expectations. That is a great achievement, but it represents an enormous challenge as well. The United Nations must succeed, because if it fails the gravity of the situation will manifestly be that much greater. However, we can see clearly that, despite all the attempts at intimidation, bribery, distortion and hostage-taking, and all the other devices used by Saddam Hussein, the world coalition has worked remarkably well.

Resolution after resolution has been passed by the United Nations Security Council. It has now produced 11, culminating with resolution 678, and we see in them all the strength and determination in the world position against Iraq's aggression. That is reflected in the original resolution 660, through the imposition of embargoes in resolution 661, to the recognition in resolution 678 that although a peaceful settlement is sought as a result of embargoes, there exists also a credible military option—the backing of sanctions with a manifestly credible potential use of force.

That situation was well echoed in the remarks of the hon. Members for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), who made their positions clear. The same can be said of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), and of my hon. Friends the Members for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), and for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir. J. Stokes), and of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence).

There is a credible military option. The majority of the substantial forces now in the Gulf are American, but it is truly a world effort, with more than 30 nations involved. Forces have been contributed from every continent. Sixteen countries have ground forces in Saudi Arabia, and four fifths of them are Muslim countries. We have made our own contribution. We now have some 17,000 personnel in theatre, and that figure will build rapidly in the weeks immediately ahead, taking our commitment in theatre to some 35,000, comprising the First Armoured Division, together with the naval components, which is a very credible contribution to the united effort.

I must strike one discordant note in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). He asked me to agree that, while we should go ahead with deployments in the Gulf, the arrangements in respect of "Options for Change" and economies in other areas should be discontinued. I can give my hon. Friend no such assurance. It is precisely because we must ensure that we make the best use of our defence resources and do not waste them in areas where they are not needed that they can make the most effective contribution where they are wanted most.

There seems to be a rumour running around Falkirk, shared between east and west, that there is some chance of conscription being introduced. I do not know why Falkirk in particular has got that message, but I must tell the hon. Members for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) jointly that there is no truth in it. We have no plans for conscription in the sense that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East suggested. When I announced the deployment of the First Armoured Division and the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) both expressed their concern about medical provision, I made it clear that we shared that concern, and would examine possible selective use of reservists in specialist areas, particularly the medical field. I am glad to say that we have had a most encouraging response from people in the medical field and specialists volunteering—both reservists and Territorial Army—to go to the Gulf.

Many employers have undertaken to protect the jobs of those who volunteer, but some volunteers remain concerned about the security of their jobs if they go. At the moment I am seeing whether we can get enough volunteers who are free of that concern, so that we do not need to take any steps, but it might be necessary to call limited numbers up, under the Reserve Forces Act 1980, which would provide employment protection for any volunteers—the House will understand the importance of this.

I shall seek to maintain the voluntary basis, but I shall also seek to ensure that volunteers have employment protection. I hope that the House will think that that approach is sensible. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) will forgive me—I have directly answered the point that he made. If it is necessary for me to take powers under the Act, I shall report to the House.

It is enormously encouraging how much suppport we are getting from other countries. I have just returned from a meeting of the Western European Union, which I attended with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I was able to ask for further medical support for our forces in the Gulf, and that is now progressing well.

There is another matter which I should report to the House which I know is of concern. Tonight we are celebrating the reunion of many families who have been separated since August. I passionately believe that one of the reasons why they are being reunited tonight is that other people in our forces have been prepared to accept separation in the line of duty, to establish the military option in the Gulf. We should recognise that. A considerable number of wives will be without their husbands for Christmas and new year—they may be in Germany, or in other theatres. Husbands and sons have gone to play their part among British forces in the Gulf. They have borne that cheerfully and have not undertaken it in any grudging spirit.

There have been some criticisms about whether people would recognise that fact. Therefore, I want the House to know how much I appreciate the British public's response to my appeal for support for our service men and women in the Gulf and in other areas at Christmas and new year.

I am glad to announce that the total value of gifts is now well into seven figures. Special aircraft will start leaving next week with parcels carrying the new BFPO 3000 number for our forces and a British Legion/*Daily Telegraph* stocking for each service man and woman. We are sending 11,000 lbs of turkey, 96,000 mince pies, 16,000 Christmas puddings and—to show that the Scots are not forgotten—we are also sending, rather unusually, more than a tonne of frozen haggis for Hogmanay. We are also sending a large range of gifts. A new local broadcasting station—British Forces Broadcasting Service—will start this weekend and will operate 24 hours a day in the Jubail area.

I am glad to say that both Mercury and British Telecom are arranging new telephone facilities. In addition to various cheap call facilities, there will be a free call for every service man in the Gulf, organised as a result of donations to the British Legion.

In a moving phrase, the right hon. Member for Gorton said that he would hate to see war in Kuwait. He would hate even more to see a wider middle east conflagration. The serious situation that we face has been recognised by the entire House. That has been shown in the debate and will be shown in the vote that we are about to take. We know that after 15 January, under resolution 678, member states are authorised to use all necessary means to achieve the United Nations resolutions.

The views expressed in the debate have been divided into three categories. One category has taken the view that force is never justified. That view is held by a small group, but their voices will be listened to with respect. I recognise that it is not cowardly to be a pacifist and to believe that in no circumstances can force be justified. However, if that was the majority view of the House or the rest of the world, Saddam Hussein could safely continue to occupy Kuwait, and he would certainly do so.

I need to address the view held by a larger group of those who are not persuaded by the Government's position. They believe not that force could never be justified but that we should wait a little longer. They argue that sanctions could work if they were given a little longer. What evidence do they have that a longer period would achieve results? How much longer should we tell the Kuwaitis that they must wait? How much longer do we tell our forces and the other allied forces that they should wait? The hon. Member for Walsall, South had it right. There is not a limitless credible military option. That has to be recognised by the House.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. King: I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman has not been here during the debate.

Another point that has to be addressed by those who query my argument is that if Saddam Hussein is willing to go, why has he not gone already? Having had six months, why should a further six months encourage him to leave? Nobody wants to see conflict. We want to see observance of the United Nations resolutions. To do that, there must be no uncertainty in Baghdad about our resolve. There must be no querying of our resolution. We must understand that we are trustees of the best new hope of the Security Council and the United Nations that any of us have had in our lifetime. It has to succeed. To do that, it will need the support of the military option.

We have now seen the release of the hostages. I made it clear earlier that, despite the genuinely philanthropic efforts of many to try to improve the position and accelerate the release of the hostages, I believe profoundly that they would not have been released if it had not been clear that we are determined on our purpose, that we are not prepared to tolerate the continued aggression against Kuwait and that Saddam Hussein has no option to stay in Kuwait—either he leaves peacefully or, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, he will be thrown out.

There was an argument about a phrase that I used a little earlier. One of my hon. Friends asked whether it would be quick and easy. I have said that it would be short, sharp and quick.

Mr. Benn *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House divided: Ayes 42, Noes 455.

Division No. 26] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs. Irene
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dennis Canavan and
Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Anderson, Donald
Arbuthnot, James
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas

Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George J.
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Tony
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grist, Ian
Grocott, Bruce
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Ingram, Adam
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leadbitter, Ted
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ron
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michael, Alun
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Murphy, Paul
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prescott, John
Price, Sir David
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Randall, Stuart
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shearman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975

10.15 pm

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I beg to move,

That Schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 be amended as follows:—

PART II OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entry

1. The following entry shall be inserted at the appropriate place:—

The Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland.

Entries omitted

2. The following entries shall be omitted:—

The General Practice Finance Corporation.
The entry beginning 'A Medical Appeal Tribunal'.
The New Towns Staff Commission.
The Police Complaints Board for Northern Ireland.
The Traffic Commissioners for any area (including the commissioner for the Metropolitan Traffic Area).
The Tribunal established under Part II of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949.
The University Grants Committee.

Other amendments

3.—(1) In the entry 'The National Development Team for Mentally Handicapped People', for 'Mentally Handicapped People' there shall be substituted 'People with a Mental Handicap'.

(2) For the entry 'The Northern Ireland Electricity Service' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Northern Ireland Electricity.

PART III OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

4. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

Additional Commissioner of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland.
Chairman of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.
Chairman of the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.
Chairman of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.
Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Laganside Corporation.
Chairman of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications.
Chairman of the Public Health Laboratory Service Board.
Chairman of a special health and social services agency established under Article 3 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Special Agencies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990.
Chairman of the Special Hospitals Service Authority.
Chairman of the Training, Enterprise and Education Advisory Group for Wales.
Chief executive of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board.
Director of Caledonian MacBrayne Limited.
Director of Citybus Limited.
Director of Flexibus Limited.
Director of Northern Ireland Airports Limited.
Director of Northern Ireland Railways Company Limited.
Director of Nuclear Electric p.l.c.
Director of Scottish Nuclear Limited.
Director of Ulsterbus Limited.
Member of a Medical Appeal Tribunal appointed under paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 12 to the Social Security Act 1975.
Member of a Medical Appeal Tribunal for Northern Ireland appointed under paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 12 to the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.
Member of the panel of chairmen for Social Security Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland appointed

[Mr. Tim Renton]

under section 97(2D)(a) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975, or of the panel of chairmen for Medical Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland appointed under paragraph 2(4)(a) of Schedule 12 to that Act.

Member of the staff of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Person appointed under section 3(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to carry out functions relating to the political restriction of posts under local authorities, within the meaning of Part I of that Act.

Social fund Commissioner.

Traffic commissioner for any area constituted for the purposes of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981.

Entries omitted

5. The following entries shall be omitted:—

The entry beginning 'Chairman of any of the Consultative Councils'.

The entry beginning 'Chairman of either of the Consultative Councils'.

Chairman of the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas.

Chairman in receipt of remuneration of the Electricity Consumers' Council.

Chairman of the Manpower Services Committee for Scotland.

Chairman of the Manpower Services Committee for Wales.

Chairman of the Board of the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education.

Chairman of the National Seed Development Organisation Limited.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Staffs Council for the Health and Social Services.

Chairman or Chief Executive of the Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board.

Chairman of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland.

The entry beginning 'The Commissioner appointed'.

Director of the British Petroleum Company p.l.c. nominated by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Harland and Wolff p.l.c.

Director of Royal Ordnance p.l.c.

Director of S.B. (Realisations) p.l.c. nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Short Brothers p.l.c.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the Airports Act 1986) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the Gas Act 1986) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

General Manager or Secretary of the Scottish Special Housing Association.

Member of a panel appointed under section 97(2D)(a) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975 of persons eligible to act as chairmen of Social Security Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland.

Member of the Trinity House Lighthouse Board nominated by the Secretary of State.

Other amendments

6.—(1) In the entry beginning 'Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Dental Estimates Board', for 'Estimates' there shall be substituted 'Practice'.

(2) In the entry beginning 'Chairman of the Scottish Dental Estimates Board', for 'Estimates' there shall be substituted 'Practice'.

(3) In the entry 'Chairman of the tribunal constituted under section 463 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970', for '463' and '1970' there shall be substituted '706' and '1988' respectively.

(4) In the entry beginning 'Chairman of the United Kingdom Central Council', the words from 'if appointed' onwards shall be omitted.

(5) In the entry 'Director of British Nuclear Fuels Limited', for 'Limited' there shall be substituted 'p.l.c.'.

(6) In the entry beginning 'Director of any company in receipt of financial assistance', the words from 'the Distribution of Industry Act 1945' to '1967,' shall be omitted.

(7) For the entry 'Member of a Wages Council or Central Co-ordinating Committee appointed under paragraph 1(a) of Schedule 2 to the Wages Councils (Northern Ireland) Order 1982' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of a Wages Council appointed under paragraph 1(b) of Schedule 2 to the Wages (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

PART IV OF SCHEDULE 1

7. In the first column, for the entry 'Her Majesty's Commissioner of Lieutenancy in the City of London' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of Her Majesty's Commission of Lieutenancy for the City of London.

The motion seeks the approval of the House to the amendment by Order in Council to schedule 1 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975— *[Interruption.]* I am delighted to know from the encouraging noises around me that this is a matter of such widespread interest to all hon. Members.

As the House is well aware, the Act is concerned with the maintenance of the independence of the House and the safeguarding of hon. Members from undue influence by the Executive through the exercise of its patronage. Schedule 1 lists those offices whose holders are thereby disqualified from membership of the House.

It has been the usual practice for any legislation that establishes new offices or winds up existing ones to amend schedule 1 accordingly. The 1975 Act is therefore reprinted from time to time, in accordance with the provisions of that Act, to incorporate such amendments. The last reprint was made on 1 January 1987. A further reprint will be ordered when the new order has been made. In addition, from time to time it is necessary to use the procedure outlined in section 5(1) to bring schedule 1 up to date by Order in Council. That section provides for the schedule to be amended, following a resolution by the House, either by adding offices which have been created by administrative action, by amending or correcting existing entries, or by deleting offices that no longer exist or for which statutory disqualification is no longer appropriate. The procedure has been followed on eight previous occasions, the first being in 1961 and the last in December 1986.

Copies of the explanatory note describing the amendments in detail have been available in the Vote Office since 5 December. I hope that hon. Members have read and studied the note with great care.

Ministers have been individually responsible for the details of the additional entries and deletions that cover offices within their areas of responsibility. They have based their judgments on the same general principles and criteria which have been followed in the past and which are covered in the explanatory note.

Of the 66 amendments covered, 27 are new entries, 29 are deletions and 10 are amendments to existing entries. Approximately 202 office holders will be brought into the scope of schedule 1; and up to 120 others will no longer be disqualified, including the holders of offices that have been abolished. There is, therefore, a net increase of 82 office holders being disqualified. However, of the 202 who have been added to the schedule, 70 are members of staff of the

Northern Ireland Audit Office who were formerly disqualified as civil servants under section 1(1)(b) of the Act.

We propose that the de minimis level—that is, the level below which the paid offices in the gift of the Crown or Ministers do not normally attract disqualification—should be raised to £7,000. The de minimis limit has no effect on the level of remuneration received by office holders. Its purpose is merely to prevent trivial disqualification. The 1986 figure of £5,000 has been uprated in line with movements in average earnings. We are following a well established procedure, and I commend the motion to the House.

10.20 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): May I first welcome the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) to the Dispatch Box as Minister of State, Privy Council Office? Recently a few Ministers have jumped in and out of office quickly and the previous incumbent of his post, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), held it for only a few months before he was promoted to the Treasury Bench. However, the office is one in which the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex will be able to speak. Previously as Chief Whip he always had to hold his tongue.

I inform Conservative Members who are hanging about that the Opposition Front Bench has no intention of forcing a Division on the motion. I cannot speak for individual hon. Members, but Front-Bench Members wish the motion to go through because clearly the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 needs to be updated from time to time. It was last updated in 1986 and it is time for a further one.

I shall detain the House for only a few minutes to ask the Minister some questions about the motion. First, I should like to hear from him that the motion is basically a consolidation and updating of the Act. Certain positions which no longer exist have been struck off and other positions which have been created since 1986 have been included. Apart from increasing the de minimis level from £5,000 to £7,000, there seems to be nothing in the motion or the Order in Council that will be laid as a result which is of a political nature or calls for debate on a specific point. It would be useful if the Minister would confirm that.

I was unable to find particular mention of de minimis levels in the explanatory note which was put in the Vote Office. There is an explanation on page ii which gives the four criteria for disqualification. Criterion A in paragraph 5 explains that

> "To prevent 'trivial disqualifications' a minimum salary level of £500 p.a. was adopted in 1957, rising to £5,000 in 1986, although disqualification might be proposed for offices with remuneration below this level at the Minister's discretion. The corresponding level is now £7,000".

Perhaps the Minister could give a little more information to the House and give examples of posts which have been disqualified where the remuneration is perhaps just less than £7,000 per annum. Is the uprating from £5,000 to £7,000 important for avoiding disqualification of certain posts under the 1957 and 1975 Acts?

I should like to make several points about particular offices. First, I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 7 on page 3 of the explanatory note. It is proposed that the tribunal established under part II of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 is now such that disqualification is not necessary. The explanatory note says:

> "As the body is rarely convened and is to all intents and purposes defunct, disqualification of the Office-holders is no longer considered appropriate."

If the body is defunct, why not get rid of it completely? If not, what exactly does it do? How often is it convened, and how important is it? I am quite prepared to believe what the explanatory note says, but a bit more elucidation from the Minister would be useful.

Let me now refer the Minister to paragraph 13 on page 5, along with paragraph 17 on page 7. Paragraph 13 proposes a new entry:

> "Chairman of the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting",

while paragraph 17 proposes another:

> "Chairman of the Public Health Laboratory Service Board".

I believe that those posts have been in existence for some time. I may be wrong about that, but, if they have, why has it taken so long for them to be included?

Paragraph 35 on page 13 proposes another new entry: "Social fund Commissioner". This is, I understand, a long-established body, and it may be only a change of name that is involved—in which case an appropriate deletion will have been made elsewhere—but, whatever the position, a word of elucidation from the Minister would again be helpful.

The explanatory note says:

> "The office of the social fund Commissioner is established by section 35 of the Social Security Act 1986. The Commissioner receives remuneration of £19,104 per annum and is required to be politically impartial."

That is quite right.

The proposed new entry will bring one office holder into the schedule. Was it too late to include that in the 1986 revision? If not, why was it not included?

Paragraph 47 on page 17 refers to an entry to be deleted:

> "Chairman of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland".

The explanatory note is rather opaque, stating:

> "The disqualification of this Office-holder has been reviewed and his disqualification is no longer thought necessary."

Again, it would be helpful if the Minister could elucidate.

Let me repeat that the Opposition have no objection to the motion. We may smile when we note that, between January 1987 and November 1990, the number of additions to those disqualified by primary legislation was 2,600, while the number deleted by primary legislation was 214. The Minister and his Government seem to be creating a good many quangos, and having to add a good many names to the provisions governed not only by the motion that we are discussing, but by primary legislation.

I remember the Government saying very stridently in 1978-79 that there were too many quangos and that life should be simplified. That does not seem to have happened. However, I repeat that the motion is necessary and that I hope that it will have a speedy passage through the House.

10.30 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I have examined the explanatory note with interest. It contains a number of common factors relating to people disqualified for election

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

—for example, because they are required to be politically impartial—and most of them are appointed by the Government.

But being appointed by the Government is not the hallmark of being politically impartial. Indeed, after the sacking of various appointees over the years, it is a hallmark of political support for the Government that anybody is appointed, so it is not a clear statement of political impartiality to have been appointed by the Government.

On page 10 of the explanatory note appears an interesting difference from most of the other appointees. No. 27, a new entry, is:

"Director of Nuclear Electric p.l.c."

The House will recall that that arises because the Government, in promoting a privatisation procedure which is a national rip-off, have taken out the most expensive part of electricity generation, and that is the nuclear sector. One of the last acts of a former Secretary of State for Energy was to announce that the decommissioning of Magnox reactors would be a charge on the public purse, not on the shareholders' purse. As a result of that burden on the public purse, there is a new Nuclear Electric plc and its directors will be disqualified under the Order in Council.

The entry to that effect says:

"Following the Government's decision to retain nuclear generating capacity in public ownership Nuclear Electric plc, a Companies Act company, was established with effect from 31 March 1990. It is considered that the Directors should be disqualified by virtue of their position of control in companies in receipt of Government grants and funds."

That is as it should be, because they will have lots of public funds as they decommission stations, as problems arise with nuclear generation and as new nuclear stations are built. Tens of billions of pounds will be involved. But the entry contains this further qualification:

"Furthermore, the duties of some of the Directors are time-consuming and would prevent them from fulfilling parliamentary duties satisfactorily."

Nowhere else in the document is that criterion used. We welcome that additional qualification, but if that criterion is being applied to the director of Nuclear Electric plc—that his duties will be time-consuming and could prevent him from fulfilling his parliamentary duties satisfactorily—will the Government recognise that if Members of Parliament are to fulfil their duties satisfactorily, they must work full time at their job?

I draw the attention of the Minister to the current Register of Members' Interests. We see that the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) is a director of no fewer than six companies, in addition to being a consultant to 3M (UK) Ltd., Shepherd (Construction) Ltd., and Plaxton Group plc.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): And he runs the Conservative elections.

Mr. Cryer: No, that is done by somebody else who is a member of Lloyd's.

Clearly, that hon. Gentleman has a lot on his plate. One is led to wonder whether this is a new attitude on the part of the Government towards their Members who fill the pages of the register so lavishly, unfortunately without giving information about their remuneration from the directorships, parliamentary advisorships and so on that Tory Members do as part of their moonlighting, while at the same time they are busy urging ordinary workers to keep their wage claims to a minimum.

The instrument that we are considering is the precursor to an Order in Council which will give authority to add or delete various categories of people. It suggests that the Government are taking a searching look at the ability of Members to do their job. It is, of course, up to the electorate to determine whether a person is fit to be a Member of this place.

It would be a good idea if the qualification in entry 27 was understood at large. It would give the Government much more credibility if, when they were urging workers taking home about £150 or £160 a week who want a bit more to catch up with the cost of living due to the Government's economic policies, not to ask for large wage increases, the Government could say, "The outside duties of not just the new director of Nuclear Electric but other appointments are so onerous as to prevent them from fulfilling parliamentary duties satisfactorily and it would be better if Members of Parliament worked full time."

It is interesting that entry 27 is the only one with that criterion. I should be interested to hear the Minister explain why that post is subject to that particular criterion. Is it in the Ministers' minds to introduce the same criterion for other entries, and they have simply not bothered to repeat it? Why has the director of Nuclear Electric been picked out when I should have thought that there were many other entries from people who would be expected to be equally busy but are not subject to the additional criterion that, as they would be so busy, they could not be Members of Parliament?

10.36 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): If the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is concerned that people should not work for more than eight hours, he should apply that limit to himself and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). We started today's debate at 2.30 pm and finished it six minutes ago, and I hope that, if they are going to take that line, those two Members will not contribute after 10.30 on future evenings.

I am having a row with the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. I hope that if the chairman discovers that I have mentioned that fact in the debate, he or she will pay attention to my fault in passing on a constituent's complaint without disguising his or her identity. If the chairman becomes a Member of Parliament, I shall draw his or her attention to part III of schedule 1, and shall take up the issue more delicately outside the Chamber.

Let me pick up the point of the hon. Member for Bradford, South about whether someone has to have a party affiliation to be appointed to one of the boards. When I was a junior Minister in Northern Ireland I was concerned with the affairs of Citybus, Flexibus, Ulsterbus, Northern Ireland Airports and Northern Ireland Railways. I was not aware of the political affiliations of any of the people that I recommended to the Secretary of State. Many of the other appointees not covered by today's motion, but by previous ones, would be insulted if they thought that they obtained their positions because of their political affiliations. If we ever have another Labour Government and they pick up the idea that everyone who serves has to be a signed-up member of the Labour party,

they will find that the quality of many of those serving will not be as good as it would if they were willing to take other factors into account.

10.38 pm

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) for his kind remarks at the beginning of his short speech. I understand his concern that when one leaves the Whips Office after a period of enforced silence, it is a matter of doubt whether one will find one's tongue again. Perhaps this was an easy baptism for me to ascertain that I could still speak after a fashion.

I assure the hon. Member for Wrexham that this is essentially a consolidation measure. The order is brought forward simply to update the 1975 Act, and should not be politically contentious in any way. However, the remarks of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) inevitably introduced some political contentiousness.

Criterion 'c' on page ii of the explanatory note states:

"Offices imposing duties which with regard to time or place would prevent their holders from fulfilling Parliamentary duties satisfactorily, ie they would take up too much time or otherwise prevent an MP from attending Parliament."

That has been in force, as the note says, since 1957. The hon. Member for Bradford, South, being a fair person, might think that that disqualification would apply especially to Members of the European Parliament: it would be difficult to be an MEP at the same time as being a Member of Parliament. Yet, extraordinarily enough, I note that the hon. Gentleman was an MEP for Sheffield from 1984 to 1989 and for the years 1987 to 1989 he was also the Member of Parliament for Bradford, South. I should have thought that his electorate would have wanted, in his words, to take a searching look at whether their new hon. Member was capable of fulfilling his duties——

Mr. Cryer: I expected that comment. The Minister will be pleased to know that, although I was for a brief time a Member of the EEC assembly in Strasbourg, I also managed to appear in the top half dozen Labour voters in this House and in the top two dozen of all voters, including Conservative Members.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman defends himself a little too much. He should have thought about the criterion rather carefully before accepting the onerous job of being simultaneously an hon. Member and Member of the European Parliament for more than two years—doubtless drawing two salaries and two sets of other inducements and expenses the while.

To return to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Wrexham, the de minimis limit is a level below which paid offices in the gift of the Crown or of Ministers do not normally attract disqualification. The reason why the limit is not referred to at greater length in the explanatory note or in the statute is that it is a non-statutory administrative device used by Departments to prevent trivial disqualification. Offices of profit in respect of which the annual remuneration is less than the limit would not usually be put forward for addition to the schedule unless they satisfied another criterion, too.

I am not aware that many posts are caught solely by the increase in the de minimis limit, but the hon. Member for Wrexham will note one example of a new entry at paragraph 17 of the explanatory note. As he said, the post of chairman of the Public Health Laboratory Service Board has been in existence for some time, but it is now remunerated at a level just above the de minimis limit at £8,085 a year.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the tribunal established under part II of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. I find it rather hard to give him clarification about that tribunal because I am told that it has no chairman and no members and it has never met. Although it has not yet been statutorily abolished, I understand that the relevant provisions or interference in the Act are to be replaced by legislation to implement an EC directive on electro-magnetic compatability. I hope that that gives the hon. Gentleman the information that he required.

The chairman of the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting is being included because the Department of Health, in one of its regular reviews of whether other posts for which it is responsible should be included, came to the conclusion that as the chairman of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting was already disqualified, the time had come for the chairman of the English national board to be similarly disqualified. I have noted the somewhat tangential comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on the same subject; they were interesting but I shall not elaborate on them now.

The hon. Member for Wrexham asked me why the social fund commissioner had not been disqualified previously. He was not appointed until December 1987 and the social fund commission was not properly established until April 1988. The schedule was last updated in December 1986. I agree that the reason in the explanatory note about the chairman of the commission for the education and library boards in Northern Ireland is rather opaque. I shall consult further my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and write to the hon. Member for Wrexham about that disqualification.

In a minor way the hon. Member for Wrexham tweaked our tail by referring to the increase in the number of posts being created which then qualified for disqualification. Prospective new quangos are always closely examined before they are created and I assure the hon. Gentleman that all new bodies are closely monitored. We keep a close watch on the number of public bodies and we shall present later this month our annual publication "Public Bodies" which will show a net reduction in the total since last year and since 1979.

I am grateful to hon. Members for their interesting contributions to the debate. I am glad to hear that the Opposition do not intend to divide the House. Once again I commend the motion to the House.

10.45 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We have no intention of dividing the House. One reason for the debate is that occasionally there are mistakes and people are elected who should not have been elected. Many of them are supposed to be Conservatives who are not in the Chamber. I resent the attacks on my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) for being in the Common Market assembly. He went there to represent me. He was my representative in the Common Market.

Mr. Cryer: It is an assembly.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, an assembly. When he was elected and out of a job I said to him, "I hope that you will shove a lock on every Common Market gravy train that you can find, Bob. That is your job." Off he went, and he set up the socialist campaign group in the Common Market. That was not easy but he managed to recruit a few friends and did a good job. *[Interruption.]* He did not get Roy Jenkins who was the posh man of the outfit. He had been deputy leader of the Labour party in opposition and was not very well paid because there was no sinecure of any kind. He decided to go to lusher pastures and went to the Common Market. When his four years were nearly up he decided to come back and set up the SDP. He proposed to step on the plane and soar into the sky.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell me which provision in the motion he is speaking about.

Mr. Skinner: I am making a fair point. What would have happened if at that time Roy Jenkins had wanted to come back as a Member of the House, before he was elected as the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead, with some kind of pseudo Common Market title that is not in the motion? Could he have been a Member? Roy Jenkins was President of the Commission and not a Member of the European Parliament like my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South, who beavered away trying to get a classless society in the Common Market. I have an idea that Jenkins was not up to that. He was busy supping all the claret he could find in the Common Market. There were no wine lakes when he was there.

Let us suppose that somebody stuck up there in the Common Market said, "I have read this document and I do not think that I am disqualified. I think that I will go back there when there is a vacancy, any old vacancy." *[Interruption.]* Leon Brittan has almost admitted that he is on his way back. He is making a big name for himself in the Common Market—at least, he thinks he is. He has been commenting on all the Conservative ballots in recent weeks. He has never been on British television and it is pretty clear that he is up to something.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. None of this has anything to do with the motion.

Mr. Skinner: The motion is comprehensive. It includes all the categories of people who would have to pass a test before they were elected to Parliament. Is it final? Does it include all the categories?

The Common Market is causing a number of ripples right across the political scene. Some people might have their eyes set on this place. Some people already want to wander in and out of the Common Market corridors ad nauseam. Who knows, they might want to take their seat here. Therefore, we must scrutinise this motion carefully.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were a Member of this House in 1974. I referred earlier to mistakes being made. In 1974, after the election of the Labour Government——

Mr. John M. Taylor (Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household): That was a mistake.

Mr. Skinner: It was not a mistake. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) caused it. He decided that he wanted a bigger majority than he had and he got belted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman should remember that it was only after June 1975, perhaps following our change of leader, that the people started throwing out Labour Members of Parliament in the by-elections and the Labour Government had to make an alliance with Lord Jenkins and his party——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the motion before the House.

Mr. Skinner: I want to prevent mistakes being made, but I must answer the hon. Gentleman. It was not losing by-elections that caused the trouble. A fellow called Stonehouse was our majority, and he went missing. We were searching for him for 12 months. Our majority went on that beach. At least we thought it was on a beach. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were a Minister, and you were having to exist from night to night on the basis of finding Members of Parliament. Then we had the Social and Democratic party mob to contend with. At that time they were planning to leave, but we did not know exactly when they would. It was not just by-elections that caused the problem.

In 1974, not long after the election, I saw a pretty obscure title on the annunciator at 3.30 in the morning and I wondered what it was all about. The Leader of the House, Ted Short, was moving retrospective legislation. A Liberal, who is now Lord Winstanley, then the hon. Member for Hazel Grove, had been elected here despite being debarred because he was serving as a doctor on a medical appeals tribunal.

Both Front-Bench spokesmen—this is what happens in this place—made an agreement to sneak the change through in the early hours of the morning under an obscure title so that no one would notice and Mr. Winstanley could come back as a Member of Parliament without his leaving the building. They sent him out the Chamber, just in case. That is as far as he went. Hon. Members get thrown out of the Chamber for saying something out of place, but he was just asked to stand outside while the measure was slipped through. In the space of half an hour, after contributions from the Front-Bench spokesmen and myself, the Government managed to introduce retrospective legislation so that that hon. Member could keep his seat.

That brings me back to what the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said. Little did I realise when I was opposing that motion that that Member's vote was needed later. It was not 1975. It was 1976, after the International Monetary Fund business when some of us had refused to support the various efforts of the Government at that time. I shall not go too far down that road, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know that your heart is aching for the past and those great moments when we lived from day to day with people being shunted into the Lobby after being brought here. It is an important matter. When people stand for election, they should make sure that they are qualified to do so. In my view, we do not have a comprehensive picture. Let us scour the Common Market to ensure that the people there who want to pinch places in this House cannot do so outside the limits of this place.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 be amended as follows:—

PART II OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entry

1. The following entry shall be inserted at the appropriate place:—

The Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland.

Entries omitted

2. The following entries shall be omitted:—

The General Practice Finance Corporation.

The entry beginning 'A Medical Appeal Tribunal'.

The New Towns Staff Commission.

The Police Complaints Board for Northern Ireland.

The Traffic Commissioners for any area (including the commissioner for the Metropolitan Traffic Area).

The Tribunal established under Part II of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949.

The University Grants Committee.

Other amendments

3.—(1) In the entry 'The National Development Team for Mentally Handicapped People', for 'Mentally Handicapped People' there shall be substituted 'People with a Mental Handicap'.

(2) For the entry 'The Northern Ireland Electricity Service' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Northern Ireland Electricity.

PART III OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

4. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

Additional Commissioner of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland.

Chairman of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Chairman of the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Chairman of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.

Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Laganside Corporation.

Chairman of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications.

Chairman of the Public Health Laboratory Service Board.

Chairman of a special health and social services agency established under Article 3 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Special Agencies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990.

Chairman of the Special Hospitals Service Authority.

Chairman of the Training, Enterprise and Education Advisory Group for Wales.

Chief executive of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board.

Director of Caledonian MacBrayne Limited.

Director of Citybus Limited.

Director of Flexibus Limited.

Director of Northern Ireland Airports Limited.

Director of Northern Ireland Railways Company Limited.

Director of Nuclear Electric p.l.c.

Director of Scottish Nuclear Limited.

Director of Ulsterbus Limited.

Member of a Medical Appeal Tribunal appointed under paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 12 to the Social Security Act 1975.

Member of a Medical Appeal Tribunal for Northern Ireland appointed under paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 12 to the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

Member of the panel of chairmen for Social Security Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland appointed under section 97(2D)(a) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975, or of the panel of chairmen for Medical Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland appointed under paragraph 2(4)(a) of Schedule 12 to that Act.

Member of the staff of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Person appointed under section 3(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to carry out functions relating to the political restriction of posts under local authorities, within the meaning of Part I of that Act.

Social fund Commissioner.

Traffic commissioner for any area constituted for the purposes of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981.

Entries omitted

5. The following entries shall be omitted:—

The entry beginning 'Chairman of any of the Consultative Councils'.

The entry beginning 'Chairman of either of the Consultative Councils'.

Chairman of the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas.

Chairman in receipt of remuneration of the Electricity Consumers' Council.

Chairman of the Manpower Services Committee for Scotland.

Chairman of the Manpower Services Committee for Wales.

Chairman of the Board of the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education.

Chairman of the National Seed Development Organisation Limited.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Staffs Council for the Health and Social Services.

Chairman or Chief Executive of the Simplification of International Trade Procedures Board.

Chairman of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland.

The entry beginning 'The Commissioner appointed'.

Director of the British Petroleum Company p.l.c. nominated by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Harland and Wolff p.l.c.

Director of Royal Ordnance p.l.c.

Director of S. B. (Realisations) p.l.c. nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Short Brothers p.l.c.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the Airports Act 1986) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the Gas Act 1986), being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

General Manager or Secretary of the Scottish Special Housing Association.

Member of a panel appointed under section 97(2D)(a) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975 of persons eligible to act as chairmen of Social Security Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland.

Member of the Trinity House Lighthouse Board nominated by the Secretary of State.

Other amendments

6.—(1) In the entry beginning 'Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Dental Estimates Board', for 'Estimates' there shall be substituted 'Practice'.

(2) In the entry beginning 'Chairman of the Scottish Dental Estimates Board', for 'Estimates' there shall be substituted 'Practice'.

(3) In the entry 'Chairman of the tribunal constituted under section 463 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970', for '463' and '1970' there shall be substituted '706' and '1988' respectively.

(4) In the entry beginning 'Chairman of the United Kingdom Central Council', the words from 'if appointed' onwards shall be omitted.

(5) In the entry 'Director of British Nuclear Fuels Limited', for 'Limited' there shall be substituted 'p.l.c.'.

(6) In the entry beginning 'Director of any company in receipt of financial assistance', the words from 'the Distribution of Industry Act 1945' to '1967,' shall be omitted.

(7) For the entry 'Member of a Wages Council or Central Co-ordinating Committee appointed under paragraph 1(a) of Schedule 2 to the Wages Councils (Northern Ireland) Order 1982' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of a Wages Council appointed under paragraph 1(b) of Schedule 2 to the Wages (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

[Mr. Skinner]

PART IV OF SCHEDULE 1

7. In the first column, for the entry 'Her Majesty's Commissioner of Lieutenancy in the City of London' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of Her Majesty's Commission of Lieutenancy for the City of London.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) this House do meet on Thursday 20th December at half-past Nine o'clock;

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 17 (Questions to Members), no Questions shall be taken, provided that at Eleven o'clock Mr. Speaker may interrupt the proceedings in order to permit questions to be asked which are in his opinion of an urgent character and relate either to matters of public importance or to the arrangement of business, statements to be made by Ministers, or personal explanations to be made by Members; and

(3) at Three o'clock Mr. Speaker do adjourn the House without putting any Question, provided that this House shall not adjourn until Mr. Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the provisions of paragraph (4) and (5) of the Order of 8th November relating to Business of the House shall have effect with the following modifications:

Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 8th and 15th March, 10th and 17th May, 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th June, and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on 20th and 27th February, 24th April, 1st, 15th and 22nd May, 5th and 12th June.

On Monday 4th February and Monday 22nd April, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 17th January and Wednesday 27th March.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Narcolepsy (Attendance Allowance)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

11.55 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome this opportunity to initiate the Adjournment debate in my name, and to raise the problems faced by sufferers from narcolepsy who want to obtain an attendance allowance.

There are 20,000 narcolepsy sufferers in the United Kingdom, many of whom experience great difficulty in securing an attendance allowance, mainly because of the failure of the medical profession in certain quarters to identify their problem. Narcolepsy is a lifelong disorder that may entail serious disablement. No cure is known, and the cause is suspected to be a central nervous system defect—though the exact mechanism is not clearly understood. There is no evidence of a psychological cause.

The symptoms usually appear independently of one another. They are typically rather mild to start with, but gradually increase in severity over a period of years. The development and severity of the symptoms are very variable in different individuals. The condition often leads in later life to an inability to work and to early retirement.

The two primary symptoms of narcolepsy are excessive daytime sleeping and cataplexy. In severe cases, either can result in severe disability. The other symptoms appear less frequently, and usually present no really major problems —though one of them, hallucinations, is common in many cases.

Excessive daytime sleepiness is usually the first symptom to be noticed. It obviously affects the individual's ability to work, and where he or she is employed in work that demands deep concentration their performance is greatly affected. That can lead to employment problems. Pathological sleepiness is evident every day, though its intensity varies. The sufferer may find only the more severe episodes troublesome. Over 24 hours, the total time spent sleeping is usually no more than normal. The abnormality lies in the individual's continuous susceptability to sleepiness or to falling asleep, and the circumstances in which that occurs.

Cataplexy, the other primary symptom, is a brief but sudden loss of voluntary muscle control, usually triggered by emotions such as those associated with laughter, anger, elation, or surprise. The severity and extent of a cataplectic attack can vary from a fleeting sensation of weakness extending more or less throughout the body to the noticeable involvement of several muscle groups or to a state of absolute powerlessness involving almost all the voluntary muscles. During an attack, vision may become blurred, and speech difficult or impossible. Sagging of the jaw and tilting of the head are common, and are frequently accompanied by a slight buckling of the knees.

Sometimes an attack will be marked by convulsive jerking, caused by the muscles alternating rapidly between limpness and partial control. It is not unusual for a sufferer —for example, a woman out shopping—to collapse in a heap on the floor. The length of these attacks varies from a few seconds to half an hour.

Upon first appearance, cataplectic attacks are mild and infrequent. They increase in severity and frequency up to a level which varies from person to person. Some people

suffer only one or two attacks a year, whereas others have hundreds a day and a typical attack may last for up to 30 minutes.

It is the people who suffer very seriously from this unfortunate disability about whom I am most concerned. Many of them cannot be left on their own. They often need attention day and night. When making applications for attendance allowance, they have come up against problems put forward by the medical profession.

The Narcolepsy Association (United Kingdom), UKAN, feels that the common factor in the problems facing many sufferers who try to obtain attendance allowance is the ignorance of many general practitioners. In most cases the GP's first reaction to the applicant's statement is "Narcolepsy—what on earth is that?". As the practitioners consulted by the Department of Social Security are often not familiar with the syndrome, they do not realise that a patient, who appears to have impaired physical and mental functions, suffers from the disorder and can be severely handicapped.

I refer the House to the views of David Parkes, professor of clinical neurology at King's College hospital. In an article in *The Guardian* on 21 September 1990, he said:

" The condition is really disabling, maybe even more so than epilepsy. It is a lifelong chronic problem. Patients are sleeping their life away. Attacks of cataplexy—sudden muscular weakness triggered by excitement such as anger or laughter—which also occur can result in broken bones and self injury."

I am aware of a number of cases in which there have been personal injuries to the sufferer.

Employers, faced with an applicant who is not only in his late forties, but who also falls asleep, suffers from cataplectic fits in the office and displays automatic behaviour, are naturally extremely reluctant to engage him. In practical terms, the narcoleptic, in full possession of his innate mental and physical powers, is often unemployable.

On account of a lack of knowledge, many narcoleptics try unsuccessfully for years to have their disorder diagnosed. I know of many cases, details of which I can pass to my hon. Friend the Minister, which have been diagnosed by a number of doctors. It is only by good fortune, or with the help of the Narcolepsy Association, that they have managed to consult a doctor who understands the problem.

GPs often made comments such as, "This is what I call Billy Bunter syndrome"; "All you have to do is to pull yourself together"; or even, "There is only one thing I can prescribe for that"—usually psychotropic medication—"and I do not believe in it." Often the lack of knowledge extends to consultant neurologists of which there are no more than half a dozen in the United Kingdom whose names can be given to a patient's GP with any confidence.

The worst outcome is referral to a psychiatrist, who will assume that the patient's disorder is mental and not neurological and give quite unsuitable treatment. It is not uncommon for narcoleptics to be prescribed tranquillisers and sleeping pills. Such medication, and the more extreme forms of therapy such as electric shock treatment, make the condition worse. Unfortunately, I am aware of examples in which a drug called Ritalin, which helps narcoleptics, has been prescribed and, because the patient's level of activity has been raised so high, they have then been prescribed Mogadon in the evening, which has the opposite effect. That leaves them on a sort of rollercoaster that does not help the condition.

The major problem facing a narcolepsy sufferer in securing a diagnosis is general practitioners' lack of knowledge. The case that came to my attention was that of Mrs. Lloyd. She is a constituent of mine and her case is typical of the problems faced by narcolepsy sufferers. She first applied for attendance allowance in 1987 and I first wrote to my right hon. Friend the Minister in December 1987 requesting that he assist me in speeding up the process. Since then it has been subject to one appeal after another. It has now arrived on the doorstep of the social security commissioner who has recently made a decision.

Mrs. Lloyd is a severe sufferer. Her husband, John, has been to see me on a number of occasions. He is a dedicated man who has suffered a heart attack and who, in his old age, is looking after his 65-year-old wife. He is alert to every nuance of his wife's breathing. A slight jerk of her body has him tearing out of bed to be at her side. He lies at night, dozing, just watching her in case she suffers an attack. She suffers from sleep attacks in which she stops breathing and he has to be on hand to ensure that she is revived. He lives with that from day to day. Naturally, the anxiety that it is causing him is terrific.

According to the Attendance Allowance Board, that lady, who is suffering from such a debilitating problem, does not qualify for day or night attendance allowance. As a consequence, the family manages as best it can without something that many of us would regard as essential.

Recently, Mr. Rice, the social security commissioner, said that two questions should be asked in relation to each sufferer from narcolepsy and attendance allowances generally. First, one should ask whether there is any danger to the applicant; and, secondly, whether that danger could be averted by supervision. In Mrs. Lloyd's case, Mr. Rice has directed that the case should go back to the Attendance Allowance Board to be reconsidered, but this is nearly three and a half years after the original application. As far as I can see in Mrs. Lloyd's case, the answer to both Mr. Rice's questions is, yes.

I could go on at length about a number of cases and I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of many of them. They have come to my attention from all over the country. All I can say to my hon. Friend is that there are many people suffering from narcolepsy who need day and night attendance from relatives to help to keep them alive. The main problem against which we are fighting is ignorance in the medical profession and, often, doctors' unwillingness to diagnose what is an important problem.

I trust that by bringing this problem to the House's attention I will widen awareness of it and, I hope, help sufferers such as Mrs. Lloyd and many others.

11.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on having this subject accepted for an Adjournment debate. I understand that this is the first time that he has been in this situation, and it is certainly a first time here for me tonight.

The Government are fully committed to giving as much support as they can to helping severely disabled people.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

However, merely to have a disease of whatever sort is not in itself a passport to benefits or to attendance allowance. As my hon. Friend so rightly said, what is relevant is the satisfactory answer to the question whether the effects of the disease are such as to justify supervision.

The benefit that my hon. Friend raised tonight, and which therefore most concerns us, is attendance allowance. It may help if I remind the House of the background to the allowance. It was introduced in 1971 as a single, flat-rate benefit for people who need a lot of attention or supervision both by day and by night. A separate, lower rate was introduced two years later for those who satisfy the conditions only either by day or by night.

Decisions on whether the medical criteria are satisfied are made by the Attendance Allowance Board or, more commonly, by delegated medical practitioners—generally referred to as DMPs—acting on its behalf. In reaching their decision, DMPs have regard to a full report of the claimant's condition and attendance needs which has been completed by another doctor who has visited the claimant for that purpose. The claimant is invited to have a carer present at this visit and any relevant points made by the claimant or by the carer are included in the report.

In some cases, the DMP finds it necessary to obtain further medical evidence from a specialist who has dealt with the case or from the claimant's own general practitioner. The claimant can also submit any other evidence that he or she thinks may be relevant. The DMPs follow published comprehensive guidance issued by the Attendance Allowance Board. The board consists of experts in different areas of medicine and others who have a professional interest in people with disabilities.

Attendance allowance is a benefit aimed at helping people to meet the extra costs generally associated with severe disabilities. Its purpose is to provide a broad level of support, as of right, to many disabled people—almost 800,000 at present. It is not related to any particular costs or disablement, but focuses on the care needs arising from the claimant's condition.

This is an essential principle on which the structure of the benefit is based. It is also the element which enables attendance allowance to be applied quickly to new conditions and illnesses, whatever their nature, as they are identified. To attempt to regulate for every type of disablement or medical condition which might give rise to entitlement to attendance allowance would be bound to lead to a very complex scheme. It would also be bound to lead to delays such as the delay that my hon. Friend has rightly deplored. For that reason, I am convinced that it would not be appropriate simply to make narcolepsy in itself a sufficient condition for attendance allowance.

I can understand the sentiments which clearly underlie my hon. Friend's concern to ensure that specific illnesses should passport people into attendance allowance. However, under the present rules, people suffering from any condition have to establish their entitlement to attendance allowance if they have sufficient care needs as a result of that condition. The effects of different conditions vary enormously and it does not always follow that a particular one will generate the same level of care needs.

Narcolepsy is a generic term which covers, as my hon. Friend rightly said, narcolepsy, catalepsy and sleep paralysis. While they can be very alarming to the person concerned and to others with them, those conditions in themselves do not put the life of the person concerned in danger. That must be taken into account in determining the need for supervision.

People suffering from narcolepsy may fall asleep in monotonous conditions, in conditions of extreme warmth, when they are watching television, when they are naturally tired, when they have had a heavy meal or in any one of the conditions in which people would normally feel the desire to sleep. However, most people do not suddenly suffer from an overwhelming compulsion to sleep when engaged in a positive activity such as walking downstairs or filling a teapot with hot water. The necessity of establishing that a narcoleptic is a danger to himself or herself is therefore an essential ingredient in trying to obtain attendance allowance. It is not sufficient simply to suffer from a low resistance to sleep, which is the essence of the condition of narcolepsy.

I understand that it is very rare for persons with narcolepsy to sustain serious injury as a result of an attack or to harm others. People who are prone to abrupt sleep attacks should obviously consider whether it is wise to drive or to pursue monotonous occupations which put them at risk. However, they would be unlikely to qualify for attendance allowance which requires round-the-clock supervision on those grounds alone. They would need to show that the particular manifestations of their form of narcolepsy created danger.

My hon. Friend was right to state that narcolepsy is not a well-publicised condition. He was right also to state that it is estimated that about 20,000 people in the population suffer from it. Symptoms usually begin in adolescence and there is no question of children getting into difficulties because they are unaware of their low resistance to sleep. For most sufferers the symptoms are not extreme, and to exempt all those suffering from narcolepsy from the need to satisfy the attendance allowance criteria would be costly and also inequitable for people with other conditions, because many narcoleptics are unlikely to have supervision or care needs sufficient to justify payment of the allowance.

Where to draw the line on eligibility is always one of our most difficult issues in social security. I am convinced that our present approach is right, especially as in representations that we have received disabled people have consistently said that we should concentrate on the effects that a disability has on a claimant's life rather than on the medical aspects of the disability.

My hon. Friend mentioned a particular constituent of his who has narcolepsy. One cannot help but sympathise with that constituent and with the anxiety that her husband and family have suffered. That constituent has been refused attendance allowance at either rate on the ground that the medical criteria are not met. As I have explained, decisions on attendance allowance are for the Attendance Allowance Board and its delegates. Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can intervene. However, the lady concerned has exercised her right of appeal to the social security commissioner on a point of law rather then a medical point, and my hon. Friend was right to state that the commissioner has recently remitted the case back to the board to examine it afresh. That is the correct way in which the constituent's dissatisfaction should be considered.

I suspect that what I have said will not necessarily have satisfied my hon. Friend. Nevertheless, I am sure that he

will be able to appreciate the reasons for not giving automatic entitlement to attendance allowance to people with specific medical conditions. Even very serious medical conditions do not lead to automatic qualification for attendance allowance. Each individual case must show that the effects are such that supervision is necessary, either all the time or for part of the time.

The Government have made continued improvements in social security benefits for disabled people over the past 11 years. I welcome the presence in the Chamber of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). In his former incarnation as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health and Social Security he paid tribute on many occasions, albeit en passant in various reports, to the measures taken by the Government over the past 11 years to try to make life better for the disabled.

In 1979, 265,000 people received attendance allowance. Today, as I said earlier, nearly 800,000 receive it. It is estimated that by 1993-94 more than 1·1 million people will receive either the care component of the disability living allowance or attendance allowance. Overall, we have more than doubled expenditure on benefits for disabled people during the past 11 years. That is a record of our commitment and one about which we are, and have reason to be, justifiably proud.

Inevitably, when new diseases are identified, it takes time for the medical profession fully to recognise the effects. I do not doubt that some of the rather harsh words that my hon. Friend has spoken about medical practitioners are probably justified. It takes time for information to be disseminated. However, even if all those medical practitioners were to diagnose correctly all those coming to them for recommendations for allowances or for help with the condition and for prescriptions, having narcolepsy would not necessarily justify allowances and benefits for those patients. The slowness of some members of the medical profession to catch up with this is not having an effect on the rights of patients claiming attendance allowance. Even if severe narcolepsy were diagnosed, it would still be necessary for the sufferer to show that supervision would materially alleviate or prevent danger occurring as a result of those severe symptoms.

If we are to use wisely the money that we are rightly spending on the disabled, we have to consider each case on its merits. Sympathetic as I am towards those who suffer from narcolepsy, which I recognise is a somewhat under-recognised condition, the system should be left alone. There is no such thing as an automatic passport to these allowances and that is how things should continue, as disabled people themselves agree.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MIDLAND METRO (PENALTY FARES) BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second time, and committed.

FRASERBURGH HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

1. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the poll tax-capping rules announced on 31 October; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): As I told the House last week, my right hon. Friend sticks firmly by the intentions announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten).

Mr. Buckley: I welcome the point made by the Minister. When considering a review of poll tax-capping, will he consider poll tax-capping high-spending Conservative councils which are levying a rate well beyond that levied by some Labour councils that have already been capped? Will he also consider the consequences of poll tax-capping on the police and fire services? I understand that if the capping system is upheld the number of police personnel in West Yorkshire will be reduced by 500 by 1992. Does the Minister appreciate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] It may be too long, Mr. Speaker, but you will appreciate its importance.

Given the increase in crime, it would be detrimental to preventing further increases if police personnel were cut in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Portillo: West Yorkshire police authority made representations and had a meeting with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

Of course we shall apply the criteria for capping equally to authorities of different political persuasions.

As for why charges can be higher in one place than in another, yet capping applies to some authorities and not to others, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the charge payers in his authority benefit from a payment of £111 from the safety net and payers in next-door Barnsley benefit from a payment of £150 from the safety net. That makes a big difference.

Mr. Butler: If the size of the charge is partly responsible for its unpopularity, why not set a low maximum cap of, say, £200, with a more generous settlement from the centre, so that we penalise councils that try banditry on their citizens and let more efficient authorities deliver even lower charges?

Mr. Portillo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what his question implied: his support for the policy of capping authorities and ensuring that the benefits are passed on to community charge payers. The detail of his proposal takes us wider than Question 1—possibly into the territory of Question 2 with which my right hon. Friend will deal shortly.

2. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many suggestions he has received for alternatives to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall answer this question and Questions 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 together.

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the review of the community charge.

6. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to amend further the community charge.

10. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the progress of his latest review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

11. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received from hon. Members to make changes to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

12. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for changes to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

14. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the number of suggestions made to him for alternatives to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

15. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the review of the poll tax.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Gould: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the Secretary of State groups all these questions together, he distorts the pattern of interests represented on the Order Paper. That will mean that we have a much shorter time in which to deal with these questions than we would if proper supplementaries were asked in respect of each question. I ask you, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. How can I possibly hear when this shindig is going on?

Mr. Gould: I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to prevail on the Secretary of State to group these questions in a more sensible manner—perhaps three or four in a group—so that we can properly debate each question on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to group questions; it is a matter for the Secretary of State. If he wants to group them in a certain way, that is up to him.

Mr. Heseltine: If it is not a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to reply to a point of order. However, I shall follow the thrust of what you said and tell the House that the questions are substantially the same and, therefore, my answers are unlikely to be different. In the space of the half hour or so that separates the questions I would be saying the same thing at the end of the half hour as at the beginning.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This takes up a great deal of time. There is some help when questions are grouped because it enables us to get further down the Order Paper and gives more hon. Members a chance. It is a matter for the Secretary of State. It is not for me to say, of course, but he might perhaps consider grouping Questions 3, 6 and 10 and taking the others separately.

Mr. Heseltine: May I add one further point? There is another group of questions further down the Order Paper, all of which again repeat the point that is addressed in Question 2. I should like to answer the substance of the question by saying that I have started a careful and fundamental review of the community charge.

Mr. Steinberg: I am sorry that my question has caused so much disarray. I did not realise that it was so controversial. I should be grateful to the Secretary of State if he would inform the House whether he agrees with his right hon. Friend the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) who suggests that the poll tax should be scrapped and replaced by a property tax, which is what the Labour party has been saying for the past three years.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) has made a most interesting and constructive suggestion for the review that I am carrying out. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that at no stage during all the discussions on these matters have Conservative Members been able to provide 57 different suggestions about how to deal with this matter, which is the number provided by the Labour party.

Mr. Ian Bruce: If my right hon. Friend has had a chance to read the Labour party document on fair rates, he will know that it is not a fully worked-out scheme but a wishy-washy set of wishes which does not take us any further forward. Will he assure his hon. Friends that in his review he will make sure—as the Labour party does not make sure—that whatever system is devised bears down on local government profligacy and ensures additional Government funding for local authorities, which the Labour party does not call for in its review?

Mr. Heseltine: The whole House will feel that my hon. Friend has been characteristically generous in the way in which he describes the Labour party policy document. We have made it clear that in our review we rule nothing out and rule nothing in. The review will look at all the issues, including those raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In previous looks at alternatives to the poll tax, and specifically at local income tax, the Department has used its own version of what a local income tax might be and has never looked in detail at our proposals. It has certainly never published any response to them. Will the Secretary of State now ask his officials to look at our scheme of local income tax and let us know their conclusions? We should be happy to talk to the Secretary of State about that.

Mr. Heseltine: I appreciate the constructive approach of the Liberal Democrats. They obviously have sufficient confidence in their ideas to be prepared to discuss them with me, which is not exactly what one would say about the parliamentary Labour party, although I should add, in fairness, that the Labour party, as represented by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, has the courage to talk to me about its ideas. In that, it is at marked odds with the Labour party in the House. On the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, I can tell him that I have received a letter on this matter and I have asked officials to give me advice on it. I am aware of the point made by the Liberal Democrats and I shall try to meet it.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Secretary of State aware that I spent yesterday afternoon in Lincoln prison with Bryan Wright, a 20-year-old unemployed man, who last Friday became the Government's first poll tax prisoner? When the Secretary of State conducts the review will he consider that if Bryan had been born in Glasgow and not in Grantham he would not be in prison, because Scottish law abolished prison for debt 25 months ago? When Bryan is released on or, as is hoped, before Christmas eve, his spirits will be as high then as they were yesterday and, therefore, the vital element of fear which prison is supposed to engender among the 344,000 people who his Department told me on Monday have had liability orders served against them will diminish. Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, even if he is not prepared to talk about outright abolition, he will instruct——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a debate. This is Question Time and questions should be about reform of the poll tax not about one of the hon. Gentleman's constituents who is in gaol.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Secretary of State instruct local authorities, during the period of his review, not to take any court action that could send anyone to prison for something that is not a crime and may not even be an offence any longer?

Mr. Heseltine: I had not known that the hon. Gentleman spent yesterday afternoon in prison. I only hope that he does not know something that I do not know and that this does not anticipate events of which I can have no knowledge. What the hon. Gentleman chooses to do with his spare time has nothing to do with reform of the community charge.

Mr. Nellist: Don't be so bloody stupid. That was a serious question about the review of the poll tax.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that many things are said across the Floor of the Chamber with which hon. Gentlemen disagree, but he must not use words like that. That is not the way we carry on. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] The word was not unparliamentary. It was just offensive, like quite a lot of other things that are said here.

Mr. Michie: As the Secretary of State has not answered my question about the number of representations that have been made, because he lumped together several questions as being on the same subject—although they are not—I have to assume that he has had some representations about the poll tax from hon. Gentlemen. In view of that, will he make it public that the poll tax has been a shambles and has affected hundreds of thousands of our electors and that no amount of fiddling or meddling with it will make it anything better than a bureaucratic disaster? Therefore, will he make it public that a mistake has been made and that it is time that the Government axed the lot?

Mr. Heseltine: If the Labour party had listened to what I had to say last week, rather than shouting so much that nobody else could listen, it would have understood that I am conducting a fundamental review and, even at this late stage, I hope that the Labour party will contribute to that review.

Mr. Harry Barnes: When conducting a review, those who suggest the review should present some ideas. I should like an answer to the question that I tabled, which is: "what proposals he has for change to the community charge". For instance, will the right hon. Gentleman take into account the lessons of the history of the poll tax in this country? In 1367, when it was first introduced, it was at a flat rate that the poor did not pay. In 1369, a new banded system was introduced. On that occasion, the rich did not pay. In 1371, they went back to a flat rate which no one——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not want a history lesson.

Mr. Heseltine: Before the hon. Gentleman places too much reliance on his interpretation of history, he should understand that we have a certain pride in having one of the oldest and most sophisticated parliamentary democracies, based on universal suffrage. His claim to be above and beyond the law is incompatible with that tradition.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware that I do not come from or represent Henley? I come from a constituency where they know what work is and they know how they are being dealt with by this wicked Government. Will he do something in his review about the poor beggars having to pay 20 per cent. who cannot afford it and who —unlike him—have to go without a hot meal on the table? When he makes his review, will he get rid of this rubbish and put in its place a system that is fair to all?

Mr. Heseltine: I can only say that if the hon. Gentleman wants to represent the good citizens of Henley, he must stand and I shall dismiss him as I dismissed the Labour candidate at the last election.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Secretary of State aware that all-party consensus on local government finance can be achieved only on the basis of two fundamental principles? The first is that any tax must be related to the ability to pay and the second is that the poll tax must be abolished. The right hon. Gentleman must try to understand that, until he concedes those two principles in advance, all his talk of consensus will be exposed for exactly what it is—a cynical and calculating attempt to ensnare the minority parties and save the Tories' necks at the next election. It will not work.

Mr. Heseltine: I should be more impressed by that suggestion had not the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), anticipated, about five minutes before I proposed it, that such a constructive dialogue could take place.

Mr. Terry Fields: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A number of questions have been grouped together. Could not Question 18 also have been included, given that it deals with exactly the same subject?

Mr. Speaker: With any luck, we shall reach Question 18.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the review that he has announced will be widely welcomed by the British people? Is he aware, however, that levels of community charge depend on levels of Government funding, which in turn depend on the formula surrounding standard spending assessments? Is he further aware that Warwickshire has been substantially disadvantaged over a number of years by the way in which the SSA system works? Will he undertake to examine the formula used for Warwickshire and provide assistance to that county?

Mr. Heseltine: I know that my hon. Friend has had a dialogue with the Minister responsible and, of course, we shall bear in mind all the points that he has put to us. It is worth adding that, following the announcement of our review, we have managed to secure a substantial victory in a local county by-election in Warwickshire.

Mr. Butcher: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time has come for free state school education to be a directly funded by the state via the grant-maintained schools formula? As a believer in supply-side economics, does he agree that the additional revenue for that should come not out of income tax but from VAT?

Mr. Heseltine: I assure my hon. Friend that his suggestions today, and any further suggestions that he wishes to put to us, will be carefully taken into account in our review.

Mr. Tracey: Will my right hon. Friend keep constantly in mind in his review the principle that seems to be widely accepted that every adult over the age of 18 should pay some share of the cost of local government? That seems to be one of the best guarantees of true accountability in local councils.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand the importance that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends attach to that principle. We have made it clear that in our review we shall look into all these matters. That is implicit in our initial stance and in the comprehensive nature of the review.

Mr. Cormack: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the fundamental criterion for any new or amended system is ability to pay?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will understand that that is one of the arguments that will have to stand alongside the point put to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey). All those issues will be on the table.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Adley. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not another one."] Order. If hon. Members look at the Order Paper, they will see that I am being absolutely even-handed.

Mr. Adley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as a matter of principle, the more that is spent on raising local taxes and administering them, the less there is to spend at the sharp end? As many erstwhile functions of local government, such as education, the police and the fire service, are heavily overladen with national implications, will my right hon. Friend, during his review, present to the House the actual costs of increases in VAT, income tax or whatever if all the costs of local government were to be funded out of national taxation?

Mr. Heseltine: I am considering how best I can involve the House at large in our review. Certainly, we shall have to have in front of us the calculations to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend made a sensible and generous offer to the Opposition parties to join in discussions with him about the nature, organisation and financing of local government. To date, the Labour party appears to have had some difficulty in responding to his offer. Does he have any helpful suggestions for ways in which the Labour party could involve itself in such an important debate and discussion?

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. The Labour party's position is not as depressing as its behaviour in the House suggests. Senior figures in the Labour party in local government have already welcomed and accepted my offer.

Mr. Gould: What has just happened is an abuse of the House. It should be a matter of regret to the whole House that the Secretary of State should have distorted the pattern of questions on the Order Paper and cut short a debate on a subject which is clearly of great interest to all hon. Members and to many millions of people outside the House.

Is not the reason why the right hon. Gentleman took that step perfectly clear? Is not the truth about his review almost as depressing for his hon. Friends as it is for millions of poll taxpayers in general? It is that the poll tax, in all its essentials, will still be with us for at least two years and that, even after his review has been concluded, the poll tax may still survive.

Why will not the right hon. Gentleman admit now what he appeared to be so keen to imply during the Tory leadership contest—that the poll tax is unfair and unworkable and that, as a necessary precondition to any sensible reform, it must be abolished?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is fully aware that, when I sought last week to explain our views at great length, his party tried to shout down my speech. That was the most flagrant abuse of the House that I can remember for a significant period. Labour Members did that because they are not prepared to enter into the sort of constructive dialogue that I offered. In that respect, it is not that the country is concerned; it is that the Labour party is isolated.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Strang.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Order Paper, he will realise that he is disadvantaging a number of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Usually, Mr. Speaker, you call two supplementary questions for each question tabled by a Back Bencher. If the Opposition Front-Bench were included, 24 supplementary questions would have been asked on Question 2. In fact, there were seven supplementaries, so we are owed 17. Can we please have them on this important matter?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's arithmetic may be at fault. I am trying to reach the questions tabled by his hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) and for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and other hon. Members who have questions on the Order Paper. We shall not achieve that at this rate.

Montreal Protocol

4. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made since the 1990 Montreal protocol review conference in implementing the agreement; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): The Government have been arguing strongly for tighter controls on ozone-depleting substances within the Community than those agreed at the London meeting. We expect to agree a European regulation next week which will achieve that.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister satisfied with the progress that is being made in Britain? As some of the alternatives that are being promoted are themselves damaging greenhouse gases, may I ask whether the Government have ruled out a levy on CFCs? Some of that money could be used to finance research and development into alternatives.

Mr. Trippier: I am very satisfied with the progress that is being made in Britain, and shortly after the London ozone conference on the Montreal protocol the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was kind and generous enough to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) on the week's achievements. At that time we, with all other countries that attended that conference, had committed ourselves to a removal of CFCs by the year 2000. I am now saying that the British Government believe that that pace can be accelerated. I will be representing the Government in Brussels next week. We have the foremost position and the most ambitious targets and I shall be looking for support from all the other member states at that meeting. I think that we shall get it.

Mr. Squire: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it was only after the Government announced that we were beating the targets of the Montreal protocol that they were criticised by various green parties as being inadequate?

Will my hon. Friend underline his determination to beat targets for carbon dioxide emissions on the same basis —that once we show that it can be done, it is bound to be criticised as inadequate?

Mr. Trippier: A number of what I call dark green lobby groups act irresponsibly, preparing their press notices before looking at any statements from Ministers or even before the introduction of a White Paper.

Mr. Gould: Name one.

Mr. Trippier: Greenpeace is a superb example. It is not the first time that I have made that comment and I am happy to repeat it on any occasion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) is right. We are in the lead on the issue and I am proud of that. I am proud of the fact that it was British scientists who discovered the hole in the ozone layer and that we were the first to sign the Vienna convention. On two separate occasions in London we have hosted the ozone layer conference, and it is recognised, nationally and internationally, that the British Government are in the lead.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that the importance that environmental issues should have will never be accorded them by the British Government as long as his Department is distracted by subjects such as local government finance, as we have seen today, and housing, both of which are entirely unrelated to environmental policy and should be the responsibility of a separate Department? Is not the reality that we would do far better on subjects such as the ozone layer and reducing CFCs if his Department concentrated on environmental issues instead of regularly distracting Secretaries of State with other matters?

Mr. Trippier: Ministers in the Department of the Environment afford to the environment, internationally and nationally, the attention that that important subject deserves. No fewer than three Ministers are concentrating on the issues—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, myself and an Under-Secretary of State. There is a close link between the subjects that come under the aegis of the Department of the Environment. In fact, I heard the hon. Gentleman refer to that himself in a recent speech.

Mr. Summerson: Will my hon. Friend ensure not only that CFCs and other ozone-depleting subjects are not used in Britain or throughout the European Community, but that they are not manufactured in Britain for use elsewhere in the world?

Mr. Trippier: Those are the terms and conditions of the agreement to which we are signatories. That is the commitment that I shall be seeking to honour and develop at the European Council of Environment Ministers in Brussels next week. We want the end of their manufacture by 1997. The signatories of the third world or developing countries to the Montreal protocol have already agreed to such phasing out by the year 2010 because of technology transfer and also because of overseas aid, to which we are prepared to contribute.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister agree that the original Montreal agreement, and the improvements made to it in London, were based on excellent scientific research that had no obvious marketplace benefit? As Britain spends less than a third of what is spent by, for instance, Germany on environmental research, what is the Department doing to encourage the expansion of such research, which clearly has major implications and potential benefits for the planet?

Mr. Trippier: The Department's record on expenditure for research is excellent and far outweighs the amount spent by Labour when it was in office. Last year, the Department's research budget was increased by 20 per cent.—a real-terms increase whose significance the hon. Gentleman should be kind enough to acknowledge.

Research on chlorofluorocarbons is also carried out by the industry, which has achieved success: that is why ICI is now leading other companies in finding substitutes for CFCs.

Telford City Technology College

5. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of Telford development corporation to discuss assistance that the corporation is giving towards the planned Telford city technology college.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I have no such plans.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister make it his business to find out the precise details of the red-carpet treatment that Telford development coporation, which he appoints, is giving to this totally unwanted and unnecessary city technology college? Will he find out the precise cost of all the preparatory work done by the corporation, the cost of all the access and infrastructure, the knockdown price at which the corporation has sold the land to the college and the price that the land would have fetched on the open market? When he has found out all those details—if he does not already know them—will he make them available to the House and then send them to the corporation's auditors for their inspection?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman has already tried to block the establishment of Telford city technology college by objecting to the relevant planning applications. I am interested to note that he now wishes to advertise still further his hostility to our policy of giving his constituents more educational opportunities and choice.

The role of Telford development corporation has been confined to encouraging this excellent project. There has been no "red-carpet" treatment; a site has been provided at a price that was negotiated having regard to the ground conditions of the land concerned and the educational usage—a price of £420,000.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This question is about Telford.

Mr. Devlin: Does my hon. Friend agree that the role of a development corporation is to redevelop rundown inner-city centres and to create new opportunities and lifestyles in them? Is not that role fully compatible with that of CTCs, and should not Telford development corporation do all that it can to assit the city technology college, as our development corporation in Teesside is doing?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. The development corporation should have regard to the interests of everyone living in the area and I am entirely satisfied that that is what Telford development corporation has done in this case.

Mr. O'Brien: In view of the Minister's absymal reply to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) and the fact that he is not prepared to meet the chairman of Telford development corporation, will he prevail on the Secretary of State to introduce some democracy into the corporation? Let us see some of the money that the Secretary of State is pushing on to the poll tax being spent on development corporations.

Mr. Yeo: We are entirely satisfied that Telford development corporation has done an excellent job and I have already had an opportunity of meeting the chairman.

Rural Housing

7. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to take any new initiatives to increase the provision of affordable housing in rural areas.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): Yes. Since 1988, the Government have introduced a number of initiatives to increase the supply of low-cost housing in those rural areas where it is needed. Most recently, we have decided that £50 million of the total of nearly £2 billion of local authority credit approvals in 1991-92 should be set aside for a new programme for low-cost rural housing, mainly through local authority sponsorship of housing association schemes. I have now decided that these resources should be allocated as supplementary credit approvals, to ensure that they are targeted on authorities where they will have the greatest impact, and we shall shortly be inviting eligible authorities to make bids for a share of them.

Mr. Pike: I accept that this may be at least a small step in the right direction. Do not the Government recognise, however, that "Faith in the Countryside" identified a strong feeling that the Government had failed to appreciate that councils provide a major source of housing to meet the needs of the less well-off who want to rent property in rural areas? Does the Minister now intend to make it possible for local authorities to provide the extra housing that is needed, at affordable rents?

Sir George Young: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's small tribute at the beginning of his question. This initiative is the responsibility of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), to whose work on housing I pay tribute. As for the hon. Gentleman's substantive question, we have made it clear that we see housing associations rather than local authorities as the main providers of affordable accommodation. Within the Housing Corporation's growing budget, a greater percentage of its resources will go to rural areas.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his welcome return to the Dispatch Box. Is he aware that there is considerable concern in South Herefordshire district council that it is being frustrated in discharging its responsibilities as the facilitator and enabler of low-cost housing for its people? Is he also aware that last year about 97 per cent. of the Housing Corporation's resources for the west midlands area went into the west midlands conurbation, leaving only a small amount for rural areas? Will he tackle the Housing Corporation? We feel very strongly about the matter.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right. In a number of villages there is resentment towards second home owners or long-distance commuters who buy up homes, to the disadvantage of those who live locally. I am in touch with the Housing Corporation. It has a special rural programme targeted on the smallest villages, such as the ones referred to by my hon. Friend. By 1992-93 we hope that that programme will rise to 1,850 approvals. Housing associations in rural areas will be able to bid for resources and I hope that my hon. Friend's local authority will be successful.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister agree that the drift to the cities and the pressure on existing houses in city areas is partly because of the lack of housing for rent in rural areas?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Since when has the hon. Gentleman represented a rural area?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister therefore agree that yesterday's statement by the bishops of England and Wales about homelessness in Britain could not have come at a more timely moment? What further action does he intend to take to tackle the problem of homelessness?

Sir George Young: A separate question about homelessness appears later on the Order Paper. This question is mainly about rural areas. I have already explained that the Housing Corporation will devote increased resources to the provision of affordable homes in rural areas.

Right to Buy

8. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council and new town commission homes have been sold to sitting tenants since 1 January 1980.

Mr. Yeo: It is estimated that between January 1980 and September 1990 almost 1·2 million council and new town commission homes have been sold to sitting tenants in England.

Mr. Dunn: First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. As Conservative Members believe in giving village people a stake in society through the extension of home ownership, will he confirm as soon as possible when he intends to introduce legislation to extend the rents-to-mortgages scheme throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. His question demonstrates that he, like my other hon. Friends, has the interests and aspirations of tenants at heart. We intend to monitor carefully the progress of the rents-to-mortgages pilot scheme in Basildon which, during the short time that it has been available, has aroused considerable interest. My hon. Friend's encouragement to us will be an important factor to be taken into account

when we decide whether to extend the experiment, although, as he acknowledged, to extend it to all local authority tenants would require primary legislation.

Mr. Clelland: Is the Minister aware that his reply demonstrates that, despite recent events, nothing has changed and that we are being subjected to the same old claptrap from the Dispatch Box? Is he further aware that, contrary to the recently expressed opinions of the Minister for Housing and Planning, local authorities' ability to use the receipts from council house sales to provide additional council housing has been severely restricted, which has led to a complete standstill in the provision of council housing, in Newcastle and Gateshead in particular and in other local authority areas? What will the Government do about the growing army of homeless and inadequately housed people that they have created?

Mr. Yeo: When it comes to claptrap, the Labour party has a monopoly. The new system that we have introduced this year for dealing with capital receipts is designed to ensure that they are recycled so that they can be used in the areas of greatest housing need. There is no particular reason why those areas should be the same ones as where the receipts arise.

Mr. Thurnham: Now that the Labour party has changed its policy in favour of the right to buy, will my hon. Friend, whom I very much welcome to the Dispatch Box, make it his first priority to ensure that more council houses are sold? Will he have a word with Bolton council —which, in 10 years, has succeeded in reducing its stock of houses only from some 26,000 to some 24,000?

Mr. Yeo: We know that hostility to the right to buy is never far below the surface in any Labour local authority. If my hon. Friend knows of any cases of difficulty in his constituency involving people being obstructed in their right to buy, I shall be happy to look into them.

Mr. Soley: In welcoming both new Housing Ministers to their posts, may I first remind them that the average life expectancy of a Housing Minister is only six months, so perhaps they should first negotiate a secure tenancy? Having done that, will they give some hope to the people of this country and recognise that since 1980, 1·5 million homes have been lost from the rented sector, half because of the right to buy and the other half because of the collapse in the private rented sector? Will the Minister now give people some hope by allowing local authorities to replace the homes that are sold, because a right to buy without a duty to replace equals cardboard city? That is the problem.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome to me and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. I remind him that local authority lettings to new tenants, which are running at 228,000 in the latest year, are very close to the average for the past decade. There is no clear evidence that the effect of council house sales is to reduce the availability of accommodation to tenants. The fastest and the cheapest way for the hon. Gentleman to increase the supply of public sector housing would be to ensure that some of the 100,000 properties in local authority control which are currently empty are put back into use.

On the private rented sector, if the hon. Gentleman is really interested in helping us, he should stop most of his hon. Friends undermining that sector.

Charitable Housing Associations

13. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to improve the opportunities for home ownership enjoyed by the tenants of charitable housing associations.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation introduced in the summer the tenants' incentive scheme, under which registered housing associations, including charities, may give grants to help their tenants move out and buy homes of their own.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply and welcome him back to the Dispatch Box to answer what I believe is exactly the same question as I asked him that last time he was answering on this subject. Is he aware that the tenants' incentive scheme will not provide a single opportunity for tenants in my constituency to purchase their homes this year? Is that satisfactory? Would not it be much better to go back to basics and to give the right to buy to those tenants?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend will remember that in a previous incarnation I tried to do exactly that. We tabled amendments to the Housing and Building Control Bill in 1983 to extend the right to buy to tenants of charitable housing associations, but were unable to persuade the other place to include those provisions in the Bill and the proposals were abandoned. In their place, we came up with the scheme for tenants of charitable housing associations. The Housing Corporation plans to spend over £40 million on grants, which gives it the potential to assist 2,500 tenants. I very much hope that some of my hon. Friend's constituents will be among those who succeed.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Minister change the scheme so that tenants can opt into it? Currently, the scheme runs only if a housing association becomes part of the scheme. Is the Minister aware that the disadvantages of council house sales, which my colleagues identified in the previous question, do not apply to this scheme under which people are paid a certain sum to leave a tenancy and the tenancy can then be re-let to other people? Will he now change the nature of the scheme and allow tenants to opt in, rather than allow the housing associations to be the gamekeepers, who are preventing the scheme from working?

Sir George Young: I have no evidence that charitable housing associations are not willing to operate the scheme. it is a substantial benefit to them in that they get a re-let which they can let to someone on their list—something which they would not have done without the scheme. The housing associations are fully compensated for their management costs and there is no disadvantage to them in operating the scheme. I have no evidence that they are unhelpful in administering it.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, when considering extensions to the right-to-buy scheme, he will not permit any new commonhold scheme to be extended to include leaseholders, on the basis that it would be no part

of any Government's remit to extend to one group of private citizens the right compulsorily to acquire the property of another?

Sir George Young: The Lord Chancellor recently issued a consultative document on commonhold and the Government are awaiting views on the proposals to introduce it. I shall make sure that my hon. Friend's suggestions are brought to my noble and learned Friend's attention.

Homelessness

16. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently listed as being homeless.

Sir George Young: Accommodation was found for 37,460 households accepted as homeless by local authorities in England in the third quarter of this year.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Minister aware that, under the Government, the number of homeless people has more than doubled and is well on the way to being trebled, that nearly 3 million people have suffered the tragedy of homelessness and that this can be attributed to factors that are directly influenced by the Government's policies, such as the decline in the number of units in the public and private sectors, the inadequate number of new builds for purchase in the private sector and a tragic increase in mortgage defaults which, at 120,000, have nearly quintupled under the Government and are accelerating?

Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool that the provision of adequate housing is not only a duty of Government but a moral imperative? Does he agree with the Catholic bishops' conference that the crisis of homelessness under the Government is not only a fact but a scandal?

Sir George Young: I have read the report produced yesterday by the Catholic bishops. They recognise that the problems of homelessness date from some time before the Conservative party came to Government. They pay tribute to a number of initiatives that the Government have introduced to tackle homelessness. Of course, they recognise, as I do, that more needs to be done.

As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, a £300 million initiative is under way to get people out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Some £96 million is being spent in London to deal with the problems of those sleeping rough. I suspect that the 3 million people to whom the hon. Gentleman referred are those who have been rehoused by local authorities. Most would never have been homeless but would have moved directly from where they were living, often in satisfactory conditions, straight into local authority accommodation. Although they score as homeless households, at no stage were the vast majority of them homeless.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that one tragedy for the homeless is that there are more empty units of accommodation than there are people seeking homes? There are more than 10,000 empty council houses in five Labour London boroughs and there is much empty property in the private sector. Some empty property—not a great deal—is owned by the Government. Will my hon. Friend look at this problem sector by sector so that we can bring these valuable units of accommodation back into use?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes some constructive suggestions. The Audit Commission published a study showing that three quarters of authorities using bed-and-breakfast accommodation could end its use altogether simply by using better alternatives locally and by having better management of their housing stock. About 600,000 units in the private sector are empty and it would be helpful if there was a consensus on the recently introduced regime for assured tenancies so that private landlords had confidence that the rules would not be changed in the short term. The Treasury has issued fresh instructions to all Government Departments to reduce to a minimum the volume of empty stock. Much of that stock is owned by the Ministry of Defence and, when our troops return from the middle east, they may need the accommodation.

Mr. George Howarth: I, too, welcome the Minister to his new responsibilities. Has he had the opportunity today, and if not, will he take it, to read the front and inside pages of the *Daily Mirror*? The headline is,

"Shame on the Tories' Doorstep"

and refers precisely to our crisis of homelessness. Is the Minister aware of the growing body of concern among sources as diverse as the Prince of Wales, charities and local authority associations about our homelessness crisis, particularly at this time of year? Does he agree that the one simple, direct step that would eliminate the problem quickly and effectively would be to agree with local authorities that they can enter into private sector leasing agreements? That would take many thousands of people off the streets and resolve some of the problems that have been created by his Government.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome. In addition to recycling disused material, my Department is now recycling Ministers. The hon. Gentleman described the housing situation in emotive terms, but I draw his attention to the report by Professor Maclennan to Rowntree. It states:

"Britain is a well housed country and it is misleading to suggest that there is a general housing crisis in Britain."

Consultation on private sector leasing ended on 3 December and I hope to announce my conclusions soon.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is not one of the causes of homelessness the tying-up of housing resources to the tune of £75 million in uncollected rents by five Labour London boroughs?

Sir George Young: If local authorities could collect more in rents, they would have more resources to apply to the maintenance and management of their estate and to bring back into use some of the properties that are unlettable.

Mr. O'Hara: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I asked a specific question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to ask leave to raise the matter on the Adjournment. Did he wish to do that?

Mr. O'Hara: Yes.

Local Government Finance

18. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the progress of his latest review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave earlier today.

Mr. Fields: During his review will the Secretary of State acknowledge the disgraceful circumstances in which the poorest members of society who cannot afford to pay the poll tax are daily facing the intimidation of the bosses' court and now gaol? Is not it ironic that a former Prime Minister, presumably as a reward for impoverishing the poor, should be given the Order of Merit and her husband a baronetcy?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that we never discuss the honours list in the Chamber.

Mr. Fields: Is not it ironic that a former Prime Minister should be rewarded for impoverishing the poor while old-age pensioners are selling their war medals to prevent their receiving the draconian and immoral treatment of the courts? When will the Secretary of State live up to his leadership election pledge and scrap the poll tax?

Mr. Heseltine: The only irony is that the hon. Gentleman, who can well afford to pay the poll tax, is content to see the very poor people on behalf of whom he speaks forced to pay the bills that he will not pay.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever changes to local government finance are made by whichever Government, they are still likely to have to face the fundamental problem of profligate, wasteful county councils, such as Derbyshire, which prefers to keep in with its National Union of Public Employees paymasters than to offer value for money and which recently rejected a low-cost tender because it was in the wrong-coloured envelope?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right to draw those matters to our attention and I wish that the problems were restricted only to county councils.

Mr. Blunkett: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the most important measures that he could take in the short term to relieve the pain of the poll tax would be to increase central Government funding for local authorities next year? Given that on 10 May he called for a more realistic settlement based, as he said, on realistic economic assumptions, is he prepared to increase by 50 per cent. the settlement announced on 31 October, thus bringing it to the real level of inflation, and also to increase the revenue support grant element above the 1·9 per cent. announced on that date? Does he further agree that he should bring that forward immediately to allow people to understand that the Government are serious when they say that they are intent on doing something about the poll tax?

Mr. Heseltine: May I say how much I welcome the changed stance of the Labour party? A week ago the Opposition were saying that the only thing to do was to get rid of the poll tax at once, but now they are making suggestions on how we could modify its effect. In view of the hon. Gentleman's question, I cannot understand why he will not come and talk to me constructively about what we can do.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate very much to raise this point of order, but I should like to know whether you have any difficulty in seeing people below the Gangway on the Conservative Benches. I know how many times I have caught your eye this parliamentary Session and I know how many times a number of hon. Members who have been called by you today have also caught your eye this Session. How do you actually judge whom you should call for supplementary questions? I have been in the Chamber from Prayers to this moment. Others whom you have called came in and moved out. I do not question your right to call whom you wish, but, on behalf of all hon. Members, I seek justice in the calling of hon. Members to ask supplementary questions.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished member of the Chairmen's Panel. If an hon. Member in one of his Committees misbehaved in any way, would he call him?

Mr. Winterton: I have not misbehaved—*[Interruption.]* I am grateful for your reference to my service on the Chairmen's Panel which I consider a great and serious responsibility. I hope that in this place I have always acceded to the requests and the authority of the Chair. At no time has anyone said that I have misbehaved in this place. If I have, I apologise, but I expect justice from the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Like many hon. Members, I have considerable sympathy with the difficulty in which you have been placed by the efforts of the Secretary of State for the Environment to rig Question Time to stifle discussion on the poll tax, a matter which the Government find most embarrassing. To avoid your being placed in unacceptable difficulty in future, may I suggest that you have a quiet word in the Prime Minister's ear and suggest that at the next Cabinet meeting he makes it clear to his colleagues that any attempt to rig Question Time by linking large numbers of questions together is unacceptable to you and to Back Benchers on both sides of the House?

Mr. Speaker: It is not my function to have a quiet word in anybody's ear. *[Interruption.]* It was a rather large number of questions to link today. Such matters are frequently best sorted out through the usual channels.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is raising a point of order. He has already asked a long question. Hon. Members will debate the Opposition's motion today. This takes time out of it.

Mr. Nellist: I am grateful that at least the Secretary of State changed the practice that was prevalent a few days ago and actually notified hon. Members that he intended to make a linkage. You, Mr. Speaker, will recognise that 16 questions were reached today, eight of which were on the poll tax, and on which seven supplementaries were asked. The other eight—half of them were reached—raised 19 supplementaries. Could you consider whether advice should be given to Ministries that, by such a linkage, they skew the distribution of supplementaries so that a false picture is given of the importance that hon. Members attach to a subject? What is the point of hon. Members putting questions on matters relating to the poll tax if, by that linkage, the Secretary of State can halve or reduce to one third the amount of time that the House spends on the subject?

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not it right to point out that the reason why so many questions were linked is that so many questions were packed on the Order Paper the previous day? Is not it also worth pointing out that the best part of half an hour was devoted to answering questions on the community charge? Surely that was quite long enough.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow me to deal with these matters. I cannot accept that there is packing on the Order Paper. In this Session we have the new arrangement of the shuffle and only the first 40 questions are printed on the Order. Paper. A few months ago, more than 100 were printed, so it is a matter of luck. I repeat that the best way to sort out the matter is through the usual channels. Linking is not my responsibility.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a different but very serious point of order of which I have given you prior notice, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you could advise the House whether any approaches have been made to your office about the possibility of a statement regarding the loss earlier today of the fishing vessel Premier and its six crewmen, all of whom were from my constituency and three of whom were from the one family. You will appreciate the grief that now engulfs the communities of Lossiemouth, Hopeman and Burghead in my constituency, as will all hon. Members who represent fishing constituencies. I therefore think that the matter requires an early statement to the House about the facts of the case so that the families know exactly what happened.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Am I correct in recalling that similar tragic circumstances in the past have led to a private notice question being allowed? Am I also correct in saying that the House traditionally has shown particular concern about and interest in those who occupy themselves in dangerous activities such as fishing and that, therefore, the House likes to have the opportunity to let its feelings be known on such a tragic occasion as this?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In just two tragic incidents in three weeks, Scotland has lost more fishermen than we lost in the whole of last year. The House should demonstrate its sympathy for the families concerned. In that regard, it should also be in a position to ask questions of the appropriate Minister. I therefore ask that a statement be made by the relevant Minister some time this evening.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we have had enough.

Mr. Salmond: Very briefly.

Mr. Speaker: If I call the hon. Member today, I may not be able to call him tomorrow.

Mr. Salmond: Very briefly.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Salmond.

Mr. Salmond: May I say, briefly, that Members from all constituencies that represent the fishing industry would have liked a private notice question to be discussed today?

Mr. Speaker: We do not discuss my discretion on private notice questions in the Chamber. I remind the House that there is a debate on fisheries tomorrow when that matter can be explored and, during the debate, perhaps the Minister responsible will be able to give us——

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Sit down, please. The Minister may be able to give a response to that tragic accident with which I know that the whole House has sympathy.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am not calling any more members of the Scottish Nationalist party.

Mr. Douglas: Why not?

Mr. Speaker: Because it is an abuse. Sit down, please.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The comments you have made about the debate on fisheries tomorrow night are sensible. If the tragic events of today are referred to, however, would it be possible to separate that matter from the general debate so that a brief statement could be made on it at the outset?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that request has been heard by those on the Front Bench.

BILLS PRESENTED

Deaf Persons (Access to Further and Higher Education and Training)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce, supported by Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. John Hannam, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Rev. Martin Smyth and Mr. Matthew Taylor, presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of an Education and Training Council for deaf people; to secure preparation for, and access to, further and higher education and training for deaf persons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 43.]

British Racing Commission

Mr. Alan Meale presented a Bill to establish a single national commission of control for the whole of the horse and dog racing industries, with overall responsibility for the bloodstock, thoroughbred breeding and betting industries, incorporating the control of the financial arrangements, rules and aims of current bodies, their other responsibilities and, where applicable, the assets of all publicly supported organisations concerned or connected with these sports: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 44.]

Football Spectators

Mr. Alan Meale presented a Bill to establish a statutory liaison body for the sport of football, to include in its membership the various footballing authorities and their agencies, Football League clubs, the Sports Council, football supporters' organisations and other necessary bodies; to make provision for changes in the organisation and function of the sport; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 45.]

Greyhound Betting Levy

Mr. Alan Meale presented a Bill to extend the function of the Horserace Betting Levy Board to include the sport of greyhound racing; and to make consequential amendments to the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

European Community Documents

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 9898/90 relating to guide prices for fishery products for 1991 shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

I do not think I would be wholly justified in putting a limit on speeches today, but if all the hon. Members who are called could limit their speeches to about 15 minutes, every hon. Member who wants to participate will be called.

3.41 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores Government policies which have caused the deepening economic recession, resulting in rising unemployment and increasing numbers of business failures; regrets the fall in investment in the manufacturing sector and the continuing neglect of education and training which undermine Britain's preparations for the Single Market after 1992; and calls upon the Government to lower the crippling level of interest rates, to reverse the cuts in public investment in training and support for industry, and to promote the modernisation of British industry through the application of new technologies, the adoption of a sustained programme of regional industrial development, and a long-term commitment to a major increase in the provision of education and training.

The Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, sought more than once to deny that the British economy was in recession. That was no doubt because he remembered the prediction he had made almost precisely a year ago, on 6 December 1989, to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, when he said:

"I do not myself think that a recession is either likely or necessary."

Not for the first time, a Government prediction about the course of the economy has been found to be plainly wrong.

A serious recession is spreading throughout our economy, bringing in its wake business failures and rising unemployment. Businesses that borrowed at much lower rates of interest are finding it impossible to meet obligations at the present crippling high rates and they are having to give up. Companies large and small are experiencing a downturn in activity, a fall of sales and a loss in profit. Regrettably, they are cutting back on investment, training, and research and development.

Unemployment has now risen for seven consecutive months, with a rise of 32,200 in October. Last month, the official figure given by the Government for unemployment was 1·703 million. That figure was seasonally adjusted and it represents 6 per cent. of the work force.

We all know about the 30 changes that have been made to the way in which unemployment statistics have been calculated since 1979. If we apply the new basis of assessment—the Government's own basis—to 1979, unemployment then would have been 1·075 million, or 4 per cent. of the work force. Let there be no argument—unemployment has increased significantly in the 11 years for which the Government seek congratulation in their amendment to the motion. We await with some trepidation the unemployment figures to be announced tomorrow, as we view with foreboding the likely outcome for the whole of 1991.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members representing industrial constituencies, I have noticed the ominous signs in my area, as more and more redundancies are announced. The difference, as many have noticed, between the present recession and that of the early 1980s, which did so much to damage our industrial capacity, is that this one started in the south-east and has spread from there to other parts of the nation. Conservative Members often used to think that the earlier recession affected only constituencies represented by Labour Members. Now I hope that they understand clearly that the present downturn affects all parts of our country.

What do the Government say about all this? We know that the Prime Minister was very coy about conceding the reality of recession. In the autumn statement forecast that he brought to this House, recession was not mentioned, even if an examination of the statistics showed a fall in gross domestic product for four successive quarters. More recently, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer has been forced to recognise reality a little more. I understand that he said in evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service:

"Business is pretty rough for people at the moment."

He went on to claim that the recession would be "shallow and short-lived." The right hon. Gentleman may become closely associated with those words—*[Interruption.]* I am not making a personal remark about him. If I did make one, it would be that he was short and short-lived. I am not in the business of name calling. I am about to suggest that "shallow and short-lived" is a far better description of Government economic forecasts than it is of the course of the economy.

Why on earth should we believe those who denied the possibility of a recession a year ago, when they tell us that it will be shallow and short-lived now? Why should we believe them when, at the beginning of the decade, they so grievously underestimated the extent of a recession that wiped out 20 per cent. of British manufacturing industry?

The Government have two distinct characteristics. No set of Ministers has ever been so free with bland assurances that all was well; and no set of Ministers has ever made so many wholly false predictions about the future of the economy. In 1988, the Treasury was notoriously wrong by 288 per cent. about the balance of payments. Inflation, that "temporary blip"—a good example of the bland and easy assurance—went on blipping and blipping to its present high level. The 1988 inflation prediction was 62 per cent. wrong. Last year, it was 40 per cent. wrong and this year's autumn statement forecast was 100 per cent. wrong compared with that of exactly a year before.

We remember the former Prime Minister's reaction when a monthly balance of payments deficit appeared for the first time at more than £1 billion. It was, she said, "a freak". As we know, it has become a depressing feature of almost every month since then.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): How often was the forecast right for the public sector borrowing requirement under the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey)?

Mr. Smith: I am sure that those forecasts were more accurate than the Government's The right hon. Gentleman appears to be saying that the Labour Government were consistently 288 per cent. wrong—a bold claim to have to substantiate. I am anxious that the right hon. Gentleman should answer some of my charges. If there is anything wrong with any of my criticisms of

[Mr. Smith]

Government economic forecasts, he can spring to his feet and tell me so. But he cannot. He knows that I am telling him simple facts.

Is not it deplorable that we have a Government who display a total incapacity to make even elementary correct predictions about the future of the economy? The new Chancellor has adopted the same techniques as his predecessor. I am sure that the phrase "shallow and short-lived" will take its place in the litany of complacent assurances—the world of blips, freaks and economic miracles—with which the Government are associated.

I suspect that the new Chancellor may seek to distance himself, especially as the recession deepens, from past boasts about economic miracles. Like the new Prime Minister, he has been closely involved in the Government's economic policy all along, and has been willing to go along with the absurd hypes that have accompanied the inaccurate predictions. In the public expenditure debate in 1988, he spoke about a

"complete and dramatic . . . transformation of our economy".—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 382.]

Even in January this year, when there was more evidence to the contrary, the right hon. Gentleman was peddling the same nonsense. In the debate on the autumn statement on 23 January he again claimed that the economy had transformed itself and was doing better than ever. If the economy was doing better than ever in January, what on earth are we doing with a recession in December?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the Opposition's arts spokesman made a pledge at the Edinburgh festival to give free television licences to all pensioners? Is he prepared to confirm or deny that pledge?

Mr. Smith: I cannot congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his sense of relevance, because we are discussing unemployment and recession. However, he totally misrepresents my hon. Friend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] If I wasted my time seeking to correct the misapprehensions of Conservative Members, the debate would get nowhere. *[Interruption.]* It is plain that Conservative Members do not like to be told the facts about their mishandling of the economy. They do not like to be told about unemployment, recession and their own inaccurate forecasts. It is the duty of the Opposition to remind them of their incompetence, because we were sent to the House to represent people who are suffering as a result of their policies.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The right hon. and learned Gentleman stresses unemployment. How many countries in the Economic Community have a lower rate of unemployment than the United Kingdom as measured by the independent labour force survey?

Mr. Smith: As the hon. Gentleman knows, one of the great difficulties in Britain is the bogus system used for assessing unemployment. To my knowledge, no other country in the EC or even the OECD calculates part-time jobs as full-time employment. When Conservatives abandon the practice of misusing every statistic that comes to their hands, we will be prepared to take statistical comparisons from them.

I shall return to the subject of the debate, which is the recession, a topic that Conservative Members want to avoid. If we cannot accept the Government's figures, let us look elsewhere for a more realistic appreciation of Britain's economic situation. The latest CBI forecast for the economy shows a decline of 1 per cent. in GDP next year and a drop of more than 6 per cent. in investment. That forecast is in line with the latest business survey, which has often been quoted with approval by Conservative Members. That assessment does not show that the difficulties ahead will be either shallow or short-lived. All the evidence points to the risk of a recession more serious and more prolonged than the Government are ever prepared to admit. Many economists admit that predicting the future course of the economy is not always easy and that changing the direction of the economy has its difficulties.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The right hon. and learned Gentleman should ask his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey).

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady should listen.

It has been pointed out that it takes time to alter course, and that a modern economy is as difficult to manoeuvre as a large oil tanker. Such an analogy may have been lurking in the mind of the Prime Minister and former Chancellor when he gave an interview to the *Financial Times* on 27 October. He told Peter Norman:

"It will take some time, it always does, to change the economy. It's like turning the Titanic round, as you know."

There must have been some subliminal force at work, or perhaps there was an internal and unpublished Treasury forecast, disordering the right hon. Gentleman's pattern of thought. The fact was that the Titanic did not turn round—if it had, it would not have collided with the iceberg. I shudder to think in what direction our economy would move if we were to adopt, as apparently the Government are, the navigational principles practised by those in charge of the Titanic. Such revealing analogies fail to provide a sense of confidence that the Government, their head or their members, have much of a clue about steering the economy in any direction.

The unavoidable truth is that we are in our present difficulties with a massive balance of payments deficit, the highest levels of inflation and of interest rates among the leading industrial nations, and with high and rising unemployment because of major errors by the Government in the handling of our economic affairs. What is happening now, in an interesting development, is that responsibility is becoming much more clear as our problems increase.

Let us take the balance of payments deficit. We were told in earlier years that we should not concern ourselves about the deficit in the current account because it was a problem of success. It was principally the result of an investment boom and the consequence of excessive demand. We were assured that it would correct itself as demand subsided. Now demand has emphatically subsided, but, I regret to say, investment is in substantial decline, while the balance of payments has not corrected itself. Despite the recession and despite what lies ahead of us, the autumn statement forecast a deficit of £11 billion next year.

The only conclusion that can be reached on the basis of that evidence is that, once again, the Government's assurances flowed from flawed analysis. The balance of

payments deficit in the United Kingdom is a structural problem, arising to a large extent from neglect of the manufacturing sector. The most dramatic evidence of that neglect is that investment in manufacturing, which plummeted in the recession of the early 1980s, only caught up with 1979 levels in 1988, and is once again in sharp decline. I despair of the Government's ever understanding that manufacturing industry is the basic wealth creator for this nation. It is the crucial international tradeable part of our economy. A cursory examination of the success of Germany and Japan shows the consistent priority that these more successful economies have given to manufacturing. They declined to indulge in the fantasy that we had moved into a post-manufacturing world.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): If the Labour party is so expert on manufacturing industry, why did manufacturing output decline so substantially between 1974 and 1979, when the Labour party was in power?

Mr. Smith: Our record stands in good comparison with that of the Government. I am happy with every aspect of our economic performance, particularly in industry, and including our share of world trade in that period. I hope that the hon. Member will recognise, when he makes these comparisons, the important effect of North sea oil on our balance of payments. As we have constantly pointed out, it generated huge amounts of public revenues and, more importantly, the balance of payments was covered by North sea oil for many years. Only when it declined in value was the failure of the manufacturing sector revealed. Let me remind Conservative Members that it was only under this Conservative Government that we went into deficit.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I can hardly give way to the hon. Gentleman when I am answering the question put to me by his hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed).

What the hon. Gentleman does not understand—he is probably reluctant to face it—is the simple fact that we only went into deficit in the balance of trade in manufactured goods during this Government's lifetime. This Government have a bad record compared not only with that of previous Labour Governments but with that of every other Government who have handled these matters.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

I despair of the Conservative party's ever realising the importance of manufacturing industry for our economy. Our economy will not be put on sound foundations—it will not become as productive and competitive as it needs to be—if that simple lesson is not learnt.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I have given way frequently, and I must proceed with my speech.

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

Manufacturing industry needs sustained investment. That is why cripplingly high interest rates, well above those of our competitors, are such a deadly threat to our future.

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way.?

Mr. Smith: I have told the hon. Gentleman that I do not propose to give way to him. If he continues to rise——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Certainly not. Let me make it absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman that I do not intend to give way to him.

Mr. Holt: I shall remember that.

Mr. Smith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will.

Mr. Holt: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will regret that.

Mr. Smith: I shall not complain about what the hon. Gentleman has said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because, like most hon. Members, I take him seriously on almost nothing.

We shall face the single market after 1992 with poor levels of investment and, just as bad, with wholly inadequate provision for education and training and a major problem in research and development capacity. Let us compare the levels of Government funding for research and development in the United Kingdom and in Germany. In 1988, the last year for which figures are available, the Cabinet Office annual review of research and development revealed that Germany—then West Germany—spent 66 per cent. more on industrial research and development than the United Kingdom and 109 per cent. more on pure science. What is the result of that disparity of effort and priority?

One highly significant measure of success is the number of patents that are taken out. Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, the number of patents taken out in the United Kingdom fell by 15 per cent. In Germany, there was an increase of 18 per cent. in the same period and in Japan—ominously—there was a massive 102 per cent. increase. If that process continues, the United Kingdom will not be able to maintain a world-class presence in the front line of innovation and technological development. That will have consequences for our industry and our economy that are almost too painful to contemplate.

Industrial training in this country is simply a national disaster. Survey after survey shows that we trail badly behind our competitors and that even in recession, skill shortages frustrate our economic potential. Despite the overwhelming evidence, the Government refuse to recognise that national problem and persist in cutting the training budget. Incredibly, the Department of Employment has cut expenditure on its training and education programmes every year since 1987-88 and plans to continue to cut its budgets as far into the future as 1992-93. Next year alone—a year of recession—it is to cut its budget by £300 million, or 10 per cent. It passes comprehension that such folly can be perpetrated.

In industry, as the recession deepens——

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No. I have given way frequently.

Training budgets will come under pressure as the recession deepens and training carried out by existing companies will be cut in too many instances. *The Independent's* labour correspondent gave an alarming account last Friday, 7 December;

"The first sign that the recession is having a considerable impact on the provision of training in the manufacturing industry emerged yesterday. In some areas of the North expenditure on training has dropped by 20 per cent., and even firms in the M4 high-tech corridor are cutting back, according to evidence supplied by the Engineering Industry Training Board."

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has made it quite clear that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Smith: Not only will I not give way, but I will not be deflected by the organised tactics of Conservative Members.

Mr. Nicholls: Give way.

Mr. Smith: The fact that the hon. Gentleman rises repeatedly shows that he has only one purpose, and that is to disrupt my speech.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is doing it again. It would be for his good and that of his hon. Friends to hear what the engineering industry training board says about what is happening to training in industry. That is relevant, because the Government are winding up that board and replacing it with a wholly voluntary body. The article continued:

"Pennant Jones, secretary of the board, said that it was 'a crime' that in areas of chronic skill shortages traineeships were being cut."

If anything, that is an underestimate of the training problem in this country. As with research and development, so with industrial training—we are heading downhill.

With the evidence of the recession so clearly before us, and with some of the major deficiencies in our economy so painfully apparent, the Government must change the course of economic policy if the country is to avoid a deep and damaging recession. Interest rates need to be cut to bring relief to our hard-pressed industrial companies—as well as, of course, to the long-suffering and hard-pressed home owners. In contrast with the chronic Conservative habit of promoting unsustainable booms, followed by deeply damaging slumps—as in the Maudling push for growth, the Barber boom and the Lawson "spend now, pay later" credit spree—we need macroeconomic policies that will promote steady and sustainable growth.

For an economy with the structural weakness from which our economy regrettably suffers, we need a positive strategy for industrial recovery and investment. We need a Government who are keen to work in partnership with industry and with others to rebuild our technological base, to revive our neglected regional economies and, above all, to create the world-class work force without which we have no chance of success.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): I have been carefully following the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks about investment, the balance of trade, training and employment, and also his continued emphasis on recession. Representing an industrial seat as I do, and having some knowledge of the motor industry, I must tell him that I simply do not recognise the picture that he is painting. Does he recognise the sustained and continuing investment taking place even now in our motor manufacturing industry? Does he recognise the investment in that industry from Japan, Germany, America, France and every other country that knows that Britain is the logical place to manufacture—*[Interruption.]* Does he recognise that our balance of payments deficit is being remedied by the motor industry—*[Interruption.]* Does he recognise—*[Interruption.]* Training and enterprise councils are what the customer wants and what the boards want.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman illustrates one of the difficulties of giving way too frequently. If everyone intervened at such length, no speeches would ever be finished. I heard only part of what he said, but he appeared to deny, on the basis of his experience, that there was a recession. I fully welcome any investment in the motor industry, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that many people in that industry are severely disturbed at the effects of the recession on their sales. The hon. Gentleman cannot pontificate on the basis that he uniquely represents an industrial area. I represent an industrial area. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends represent industrial areas. They can see what is happening —redundancy after redundancy, job loss after job loss—as the recession deepens. I am sure that many of the private sector businesses that are toiling under the results of the present economic policy tell the hon. Gentleman that privately, only he does not pass on those confidences to us in public in the House of Commons.

We started this Conservative decade with a major recession and we end it in similar difficulties. The blip, the freak, the painfully short-lived episode was the unsustainable boom in between. It is a pattern which simply must not be repeated in the 1990s.

Despite the changes in the Government's personnel, there is no sign that they have learnt from the errors of the past decade, or even comprehend the perils for the United Kingdom if we do not make a breakthrough to a competitive and productive economy. Rather than the Government's constantly seeking to maintain the illusion of success in the 1980s, they should confront the reality of modern Europe, which is that, in economic terms, Germany has raced well ahead, France is significantly in front and we are now being overtaken by Italy.

That reality is increasingly understood by our people. It needs urgently to be comprehended by their Government, but I fear that there is no sign that there will be any alteration in the policies which have inexorably led us once again into recession, for which, with all its painful consequences, we will hold the Government responsible.

4.11 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the improvement in economic performance over the last 11 years and on its maintenance of tight monetary and fiscal policies necessary to reduce inflation which have been reinforced by membership to the ERM; and notes that inflationary pressures are now easing as a prelude to falling inflation and the resumption of sustainable growth.".

Over the years, I have enjoyed many of the speeches of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). He has banked up an unparalleled depth of experience as an Opposition spokesman—a post for which he remains eminently qualified.

Having listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech, I felt that there was something else to come. I was rather surprised that he sat down when he did. I thought that he was just about to get to the point when, perhaps for the first time, he might get over the coyness and shyness that seem to come over him.

I have had the pleasure of being a Treasury Minister for some years and listening to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but in all those years there has not been one occasion when the right hon. and learned Gentleman has ever made it clear to the House what are his policies to tackle inflation. I do not understand what his policy is, and the truth is, neither does he.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's speeches are always enjoyable, but they always remind me of what was once said about the speeches of a candidate for the American presidency which were described as being like a Chinese meal—delicious with a bit of contrast here and a bit of spice and ginger there, but at the end of the day one does not know whether one has eaten anything at all.

The fact is that Britain's central problem remains the control of inflation. Sometimes the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes out that he, too, is concerned about inflation. At other times, as in an interview in *The Daily Telegraph* recently, he says that inflation is just one of many problems to be considered. In recent months, he has been telling us that inflation is the top priority. But now the right hon. and learned Gentleman cannot wait to change the subject and talk about recession. That shows how much stomach he has for the fight against inflation.

The contrast with the Government's position could not be more clear. We are clear about the prime task, which, overwhelmingly, is the defeat of inflation. That is why interest rates have had to be so high and why we have joined the exchange rate mechanism.

In the past 10 years, we have had some success. Inflation has been, on average, just under 8 per cent. Inflation tends to go in cycles and it is instructive to compare this cycle with previous ones. The current peak is likely to be less than half that of the 1970s; but our record is not yet good enough and inflation is once again too high.

I noticed that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did not for a minute volunteer to tell us why he thought that inflation had increased—and we all know why he did not. It is clear that, in 1987, the United Kingdom's monetary policy was not tight enough. Most other countries made the same mistake, but the effects were more serious for us in Britain, because we had already been enjoying strong growth for several years and were nearer to full capacity. For that reason, the impact on our inflation rate was greater, although since 1987 there has been a general increase in inflation throughout the developed world. On average, inflation in EC countries has almost doubled and in Germany it has more than doubled, although it is still running at a very low rate.

Our response to that increased inflation was straightforward and clear. In 1988 and 1989, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) raised interest rates. As he himself said, it was time to introduce more restrictive measures, and that was done. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister continued that tight policy when he was Chancellor, but he also made the historic decision to join the ERM.

That marked a decisive change in the Government's counter-inflationary strategy. No decisions could have been discussed more exhaustively in advance: all the angles were considered. We knew that we were then joining the tough division of the European league. We have always know that the discipline imposed on us would be considerable. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said so repeatedly and so have I. I have made it clear beyond question that we have entered this new commitment knowingly and we shall do whatever is necessary to maintain our position in the ERM.

In spite of that, however, and despite the welcome given to the decision, some people—including the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—have not woken up and recognised that the rules have changed. If they do not listen to our words, they will learn from our actions. There can be no question of a reduction in interest rates that is not fully justified by our position in the ERM. That will be the case however strong is the pressure for lower interest rates based on other indicators. The discipline of the ERM is tough, but, because it increases the certainty of lower inflation, it also means that when interest rate reductions do take place, they are securely based.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The right hon. Gentleman told the Treasury Select Committee that business was rough. Is not his problem, however, the fact that within the ERM sterling is now very weak and he is therefore not able to reduce interest rates—which is precisely what he ought to be doing if he is to ease the recession?

Mr. Lamont: I have just made it crystal clear that our overriding priority is to maintain our position in the ERM. That is part of our counter-inflationary policy. Presumably when Opposition Members urged us to join the ERM, they, too, appreciated the obligations that it would place on us.

Our tight monetary policy will be supported by a tight fiscal policy. We have established an enviable record of debt repayment by keeping a tight grip on public spending, and, with ex-Chief Secretaries at both No. 10 and No. 11, I can assure the House that we will not relax that grip now.

Inevitably, we hear siren voices suggesting that the exchange rate is too high. Unfortunately, that seems to be a fundamental part of the British psyche, especially in the Labour party: whatever the exchange rate, it is always too high. Devaluation, however, is merely self-defeating. Far from producing the continued stimulus to output that they desire, countries that adopt that course usually end up with only one result—increased inflation. We turned our back on that sort of thinking when we joined the ERM; we accepted the discipline and will act accordingly.

[Mr. Lamont]

I have heard it said that we are already looking for a covert reduction in the exchange rate by moving to narrower margins at a lower central rate. That is not the case. There is no question of an early move to narrow margins and certainly no intention of seeking this or any other device to escape from the exchange rate discipline.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Even with high interest rates and membership of the exchange rate mechanism, the Chancellor cannot hope for underlying inflation of below 5·5 per cent. by the middle of next year. Surely he cannot be satisfied with that. Does not it mean that he must look to further measures, such as the narrow band and some of the measures taken by our competitors, if he is ever to tackle inflation properly?

Mr. Lamont: I have just made it clear that I do not anticipate moving to the narrow band in the very near future. We have given our forecast for inflation. I shall say a word about that. We have published that forecast and it is a little less ambitious than what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): The Chancellor of the Exchequer puts emphasis on the discipline of the exchange rate mechanism. That is widely understood, of course. Is he aware that he has acknowledged that his Government have got the economy into such a state that they cannot afford to risk any movement of the pound downward, even within the exchange rate mechanism and even at the cost of plunging our economy, with its high burden of interest rates, deeper into recession?

Mr. Lamont: Not surprisingly, the right hon. Gentleman illustrates only too clearly that he does not understand one word about the exchange rate mechanism. He says that he accepts the discipline of the ERM, but at the same time he seeks to find a way out of the discipline that he himself urges upon us.—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman understood the exchange rate mechanism, he would realise that I had answered his question.

The fact is that the central rate of DM2·95 strikes the right balance between the need to maintain a firm anchor against inflation and the importance of preserving the competitiveness of British goods in world markets. Above all, the rate at which we joined was the rate in the market not only on the date of entry but for some time before. Indeed, it was very close to the average real rate over the last 10 years.

I would add just two further points. We have heard a great deal recently—sometimes we hear it from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—about the need to close the inflation gap with Europe. It is an aim which I share. We have made considerable progress—better progress than the Opposition give us credit for—in achieving that aim. However, adherence to the discipline of the exchange rate mechanism is the best way to guarantee that we shall narrow our inflation gap with Europe.

I also hear arguments—not least from some of my hon. Friends—about the potential benefits that could come from an independent central bank or an independent monetary policy. Whatever the pros and cons of that argument, it has to be recognised that we have already in some measure achieved the benefits of that by joining an anti-inflationary club that has a track record, credibility and clear rules. It is important that we should stick to the rules.

It always takes time for the effects of tightening policy to show through in the inflation figures. On this occasion the delay has been particularly long. However, headline inflation has now almost certainly peaked. The Treasury's forecast that it will fall to 5½ per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1991 is by no means optimistic, compared with the majority of outside forecasts. The majority of outside forecasts are for both lower inflation than we are forecasting and for higher growth than we are forecasting. There can, therefore, be no accusation that the Government take a rosy and optimistic view of the future.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East made great play of the fact that the Government's forecasts have not always been right. He described these things as "elementary", as if he could write them down on the back of an envelope and tell us what inflation and the balance of payments would be next year. The House will recall that I intervened to ask him how often the forecasts of the public sector borrowing requirement had been proved correct when his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not had the pleasure, as I have, of being given for Christmas the memoirs of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East. There is a long passage complaining about the inadequacy of the forecasts that he was given and about how they were never right, including those on the PSBR. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may remember that his right hon. Friend said about economic forecasts:

> "Like long-term weather forecasts they are better than nothing. But their origin lies in the extrapolation from a partially known past, through an unknown present, to an unknowable future".

Forecasting is an uncertain business, but there is every reason to be confident that our forecasts on inflation can be fulfilled. Why do I say that? First, all the monetary indicators point to a slowdown. Both broad and narrow monetary growth have decelerated rapidly in response to high interest rates. The narrow definition of money is within its target range, having fallen every month since April. Bank lending has moderated dramatically. Secondly, it is clear from the real economy that inflationary pressures have eased substantially. The housing market, retail sales and a whole range of other indicators show that demand is tight and the economy is slowing.

The Labour party has never understood either the ERM or the need to conquer inflation. It has never wanted to understand. For Opposition Members, the ERM was two things. It was a soft option; and it was a cloak. No need to work hard to produce an economic policy—just parrot "ERM" on every occasion. How will we stimulate economic growth? "Join the ERM", was Labour's answer. How will we maintain confidence? "Join the ERM." How will we increase productivity? "Join the ERM." How will the Labour party avoid having to spell out any policies? Just keep parroting, "Join the ERM". The truth is that when we joined the ERM, at a stroke we completely removed Labour's economic policy. The truth is that now that Britain has joined the ERM the Labour party stands revealed as having no anti-inflationary policy and no economic policy of any kind.

Mr. John Smith: Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the question of inflation, as he was in the Treasury when the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), made a prediction, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us what his right hon. Friend meant when he said that inflation was merely "a blip"?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend expected that inflation obviously would decelerate more rapidly than it has. However, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the strong growth and resilience of the economy have made it much more resistant to tightening monetary policy and tightening interest rates than many people predicted at the time. That is a tribute to the resilience of the economy.

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: No, I shall not give way.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Smith: As the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the word "blip" was intended to mean that inflation would be very temporary and passing, what was the former Chancellor, with the assistance of the right hon. Gentleman, thinking when he gave such misguided advice to the British public?

Mr. Lamont: I have just answered that question—and the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that I have answered it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about misjudgments and mistakes that have been made by the Government, but let us look back to what he and his colleagues were saying about the economy. They talk now about our current inflation and about the fact that it has been much higher than the Government expected; but what was happening when the economy was growing strongly—too strongly? The right hon. and learned Gentleman pressed us to give it more and more stimulus. When it was growing faster than for many years, Opposition Members continually urged us to stoke up demand even further. When investment was booming they constantly claimed that it was slumping.

In November 1987, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said:

"now is the time for cuts in interest rates to stimulate the economy".

We have been over this ground before. The right hon. and learned Member and Conservative Members know of the numerous quotes of comments by the right hon. and learned Member and the Leader of the Opposition. I shall not weary the House by going over them repeatedly, but when the Leader of the Opposition said on "Panorama" that in 1987 he had been saying, "Steady, steady" about the economy, it was the most extravagant and enjoyable piece of fantasy since George IV claimed to have commanded the troops at Waterloo.

It says much about the reality of the Labour party's public spending plans that Labour Members constantly boasted that those plans would be paid for out of faster growth when the country was already enjoying one of the longest periods of fast growth since the war. As the economy grew and living standards rose, all the Labour party could do was to describe Britain in language more appropriate to Ethiopia and to prescribe ever more irresponsible economic policies. When the economy was booming, and indeed growing too fast, Labour Members described it as stagnant. Now, because the only language they know is that of hyperbole, the moment we get a downturn they talk in language more appropriate to the great depression of the 1930s.

Mr. John Smith: The right hon. Gentleman has repeated the assertion that the only mistake in economic policy was to cut interest rates after the stock market crash. As he knows, most countries cut interest rates, and I think that that was highly desirable. The mistake that the right hon. Gentleman should recognise was for the Government to go on a credit spree and make tax cuts. In January 1988, I said:

"tax cuts would feed straight through into increased consumer expenditure, particularly in the prosperous areas; and increase overheating of parts of the economy, exaggerating regional imbalances and, above all, adding a further twist to the increasing balance of payments deficit." —[*Official Report*, 14 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. 485.]

Let the Government not say that they were not told about the results of tax cuts.

Mr. Lamont: If that is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's analysis, it is the wrong one. The truth is that £2 billion, £3 billion or £4 billion in tax cuts is as nothing compared with the impact of the monetary position. Cutting interest rates has a far greater effect on demand than some marginal tax cuts.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East hinted in his intervention that he has one policy—to return to credit controls. No one believes in a policy of credit controls. The Government, the Confederation of British Industry and the City do not believe in that policy, and I do not believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman does either. The rest of the world is abandoning credit controls, but, as always with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, if he can find a phrase he thinks that he has a substitute for a policy.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spent a large part of his speech talking about recession. It is clear that the economy is now experiencing a marked slowdown—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about when I appeared before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and said that we were going through a recession and that there was a common-sense definition of recession: business is having a rough time. I said that business was having a rough time. However, I slightly object to the right hon. and learned Gentleman misrepresenting my remarks when he said that I had made a firm prediction that the recession would be short and shallow.

I have the transcript, which shows that I said:

"It is very difficult to be absolutely certain about what will be the extent of the downturn but I think there are reasons why one could believe that it will be relatively short lived and relatively shallow."

I made it crystal clear that the length and depth of any recession are subject to considerable uncertainty.

The present slowdown is having an effect both on output and employment. We will see unemployment rise further in the coming months. There are always costs involved in reducing inflation, but the costs of continuing to live with inflation are far higher. Moreover, the costs today are nothing like those that the British economy had to endure in 1981 when we had to squeeze a far higher rate of inflation, which we inherited from the previous Government, out of the system.

[Mr. Lamont]

There are also significant differences from the situation in 1981. The rate of inflation that we are combating is much lower. The core rate of inflation is less than half of the peak in 1980. Interest rates, although high today, are not as high as they were in 1980. In contrast to what happened in 1980, we have had a gradual tightening of policy. A likely consequence of that is that the downturn will be less markedly sharp.

I have already told the House how the Treasury's forecasts are more pessimistic than those of outsiders. Not just the Treasury but many outside forecasters have predicted a relatively short recession. There can be no guarantee of that. There are uncertainties in the Gulf and consequently for oil prices.

More fundamentally, at home much will depend on the labour market and whether decisions are taken to control labour costs or to reduce investment. That is the challenge for British management. Over the past 10 years, it has been given the opportunity to manage. The choice is simple: if traditional pay bargaining habits do not change, profitability and investment will be sacrificed and the slowdown in the economy will be deeper than it needs to be.

All experience suggests that once inflation is under control there will be a resumption of growth. That was the lesson of 1981 and the 364 economists.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): If the recession proves to be longer and deeper than the Chancellor of the Exchequer expects, what instruments of Treasury policy will he bring to bear to end it?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman asked me that question on a previous occasion and I made it clear that I did not believe that we should use fiscal policies to give a short-lived stimulus to demand. We must maintain a tight fiscal policy. The best way to bring about an upturn in activity is to stick strongly to the policy of getting inflation down. That is most likely to bring a resumption of growth again, as our experience in the 1980s bears out.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one certain means of ensuring that the recession is deeper and more severe than anyone hopes is for the exchange value of sterling to depreciate? That would significantly increase the costs of imports and raw materials for many industries. That is why my right hon. Friend is right; it is absolutely essential to maintain a level of interest that ensures that the value of our currency is stable and secure.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My opening remarks make it clear that I am wholly in accord with what he has said.

The Opposition profess to believe, or to have us believe, to judge from the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition, that nothing has changed in the past 11 years and that nothing has improved. I find it sad that the Labour party does itself and the country such a disservice. It is now, as the economy slows down for the first time in eight years, that the effectiveness of our supply side reforms will be fully tested. We shall discover how much more flexible the economy has become.

There are three areas in which we can see that the economy is much more flexible and adaptable. First, we now have a much larger small businesses sector than we had in 1980. There are nearly 30 per cent. more firms than in 1980. Secondly, we have a vastly improved climate in industrial relations, thanks to the reforms that the Government introduced. Our measures on the closed shop again make firms much more flexible. They free up the labour market and make wage rates more competitive. We received very little help from the Opposition when we introduced those important reforms. Thirdly, by common consent, British management in the past decade, particularly after the testing times of the early 1980s, has been immensely strengthened and is equal in many respects to the best in the world.

While British business is about to enter a testing time, the House should not forget that it has enjoyed eight very good years in which the United Kingdom moved from the bottom of the European league for growth, investment and productivity to a position at or near the top.

In no economy, not even the German economy to which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East referred, have Governments abolished the business cycle. Different countries are always at different stages in that cycle. Today the German economy is growing more strongly than the British economy, but three or four years ago the German economy was growing less quickly than the British economy. Did we hear about the German economy from the right hon. and learned Gentleman then?

Taking a slightly longer perspective, it is a remarkable fact that during the 1980s the British economy grew faster than the German economy. The 1980s are probably the first post-war decade when that has happened. Our business investment and our manufacturing productivity have also grown faster than those in Germany.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: No. As the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said, "I am not giving way and it is clear that I am not giving way". I have already given way several times.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East from a sedentary position asked about the balance of payments. I expect to see our balance of payments deficit narrow over the year ahead. The trade balance, particularly in manufactured goods, has already improved markedly. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that demand had slowed, but he did not think that the current account deficit had vanished. It has not vanished, but it seems to have escaped his notice that it has considerably improved. As demand has eased, so has the growth of manufacturing imports, while our share of world exports has actually increased. As a result, our manufacturing deficit narrowed from £4·4 billion in 1989 to £1·6 billion in the latest three months. There has been a distinct narrowing.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, in contrast to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith); but the Opposition have never liked to hear good news. With regard to the balance of payments, would my right hon. Friend like to compliment the British furniture industry, which this year increased exports from £475 million to £565 million—an

increase of 16 per cent. against an increase in imports of 2 per cent? That is the kind of good news that the Labour party does not like to hear.

Mr. Lamont: What my hon. Friend says about exports in the furniture industry is true of manufacturing exports generally. Manufacturing exports in this country have been growing very strongly. I was surprised that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East was happy to have his record on world trade contrasted with what is happening today. The United Kingdom's share of world trade under the Labour Government declined, while it has stabilised for the first time in decades under this Government. It has stabilised as a result of the strong performance of manufacturing exports.

Mr. Morgan: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Looking further ahead, the prospects for British manufacturing in the 1990s remain good. A recent report from Salomon Brothers argued that several factors would combine

"to make the UK an extremely competitive offshore manufacturing base from which to tap the booming European market in the 1990s."

The report lists a number of factors that will contribute to Britain's success over the next decade, and it states:

"while a description of the UK economy as the Hong Kong of Europe may raise eyebrows, the comparison is increasingly realistic."

That is particularly true of the motor industry. It went steadily downhill in the 1960s and 1970s. It was plagued by poor productivity and a history of industrial disputes.

Over the past few years the story could not have changed more dramatically. There has been a marked improvement in industrial relations. The number of days lost through strikes in the second half of the 1980s was running at one tenth of what it was in the latter half of the 1970s. Market shares and imports have stabilised. Although motor car manufacturers are not immune from the downturn or the effect of a slowdown, substantial investment is taking place in the industry and we expect to see a sharp rise in United Kingdom production over the next few years. New plant capacity for at least 500,000 cars a year will be up and running by the middle of the decade.

Over the next few years the Government's task will be to keep inflation on a downward trend and to build on the achievements of the past decade. We have set ourselves high standards. A couple of years ago it was virtually taken for granted that the Government could go on cutting taxes indefinitely, reducing public sector debt and spending more on public services. Those days will come again. Our achievements over the last 11 years have not crumbled away in the face of inflation. They are lasting improvements and they will be the basis of our policies in the 1990s.

When my right hon. Friend became Prime Minister, he expressed his determination to create an opportunity society in which everyone at every level, regardless of background, would have the opportunity to develop their talents to the full. By holding up that vision, my right hon. Friend was not signalling a new departure. Instead, he was emphasising his intention to build on the achievements of the past decade. The opportunity society and Thatcherite supply side reforms are one and the same thing.

Wider capital ownership; the reduction of union monopoly power; the rise of self-employment; the growth of personal pensions; the break-up of the industrial public sector; the growth of small businesses: all mean greater opportunities for our citizens. For others, increased resources for public services are also part of the opportunity society.

However, it is also important to reform public services so that decision making is taken from bureaucrats and handed back to the people they serve. That is the objective of our reforms in education and health.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), when talking about supply side reforms, said:

"the more we foster these things, the more we break down barriers—barriers between workers and bosses, skilled and unskilled, tenants and owners, barriers between private and public. That's the kind of open classless Britain I want to see."

Those words of my right hon. Friend are exactly in tune with those of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Cuts in taxation are part of the same philosophy because they give the signal that the rewards of hard work can be kept and that people can make their own way by effort and enterprise. All that is anathema to the Labour party. Opposition Members cannot understand that tax cuts and the encouragement of initiative mean opportunities for all. To revive an old distinction: they believe in equality; we believe in the equal right of everyone to become unequal.

Over the next 10 years we will widen further the frontiers of opportunity. It is our aim to ensure that no one shall be excluded, and that is bad news for the Opposition. They know that wider opportunities for the British people mean no hope for them. The Opposition did not transform British industry. The Opposition never could have taken or backed the tough decisions necessary to fight inflation. They failed in the past and they would fail in the future. The Opposition will not be given the chance to fail again. The British people have seen through their sham policies and bogus prospectuses. The Government have had 10 years of challenge and we have a record of which we can be proud. The challenges of the next decade will fall to us and we are more than ready and eager for that task.

4.49 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Thank you for calling me so early to make my maiden speech, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the tradition of the House is for a new hon. Member to pay tribute to his or her predecessor. In my case, my predecessor was not only my predecessor but my husband. For that reason, I find it particularly difficult to pay that tribute. I have been in the position of many wives of Members of Parliament—and husbands, for that matter—who know the kind of commitment that is needed to be a Member of the House. I should like to pay tribute to everyone who has been a Member of the House and to their wives and husbands for the long-suffering hours with which they, too, have had to put up.

In my constituency, which was my husband's constituency, over the past 11 years we have watched as our industrial base has continually deteriorated. It was a once-proud industrial base. We manufactured cotton, built ships, and carried out light engineering. All those industries have suffered grossly over the past 11 years. The

[Mrs. Irene Adams]

cotton industry is now just a skeleton of its former self. The once-proud mills stand empty and are falling apart. The people who worked in them lie idle in their homes.

In my constituency there are pockets in which there is 40 per cent. male unemployment. I listen to Conservative Members telling us that industry in their towns is improving. It certainly is not improving in our town. The latest casualty is Howdens in Renfrew. It was a good industry. It had no reason to go downhill, but, because of the policies that the Government have pursued, it has done so. Once more we shall watch the town of Renfrew go into a downward spiral that not only loses jobs at Howdens but loses related jobs—jobs in shops and in other industries that supported Howdens, again adding to the recession of the economy.

For a long time Scottish people have protested. My own grandfather took part in the hunger marches south. That road south has become a boulevard of broken dreams. When they come south, young people, middle-aged people and elderly people are forced to languish on the streets of this city. We do not need to walk half a mile from here to see cardboard cities and young people who are genuinely looking for work and roofs over their heads. What do they find? They find a shop doorway in the Strand with no chance of finding employment and no chance of finding a home.

Before coming to the House last week, I visited Miss Peggy Herbison, who was a Member of the House in 1945. I am sure that many hon. Members will remember her. Peggy told me that she made her maiden speech on housing. I read her maiden speech. She spoke after the war when we would expect housing to have been in a bad condition. What do I find 45 years later? We are in no better position. In this city alone, 9,000 children will spend Christmas morning in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Things are not much better, despite the efforts of Peggy and many people like her. Still, working people have no roofs over their heads. All they want is a decent home and a decent chance to earn a living. That is not too much to ask.

The Government have presided over a situation that was equalled only by the second world war. Today we still do not have enough housing. It is reckoned that we need 100,000 low-cost rented properties each year even to start to meet the problem. We have no hope of that. If the Government do not intend to change course—from what I heard today, that certainly does not seem to be the case—they should do the honourable thing and move over and let someone who can change course do so.

4.53 pm

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I have the privilege of following the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), so I am the first to be able to congratulate her on her maiden speech. To our pleasure at hearing her I add our sadness at the reason why she has entered the House. She spoke touchingly of the former hon. Member for Paisley, North. Hon. Members respected him, and, no doubt, judging from what we have heard today, we shall equally respect the hon. Lady.

I cannot, I am afraid, say the same about the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Last week, the Opposition chose to table a motion on the economy, to be debated in the last week but one before Christmas, because they were not happy about the Government's conduct of the economy and wanted the opportunity to put forward some ideas of their own about how they thought that they would do the job better. As inflation and the level of economic activity are at the heart of the debate, one would have expected to hear from the right hon. and learned Gentleman something new about the way in which his party, if it were elected to government, would tackle inflation. However, all we find on the Order Paper is a recommendation for what I presume must be a dramatic reduction in interest rates—otherwise the Opposition would not refer to the current level of interest rates as crippling—and a great increase in the range of public expenditure.

There is not much that is new in the motion. Labour's policies in government and in opposition have been consistent throughout the time in which I have taken any interest in politics, which goes back quite a long time. All Labour Governments and all Labour Oppositions have founded their policies on substantial increases in taxation and public expenditure. Everything that we have heard from the Opposition demonstrates that that remains their policy.

On monetary policy, which surely should be at the heart of inflation, in the past hon. Members have heard that Labour Members would quite like to introduce credit controls. They have not been saying that so much lately. I do not know whether it is because they realise that credit controls would be a most ineffective way of curbing excess demand in the economy, because they have now decided that the problems of introducing credit controls would be greater than any potential benefits in the short term or because they now recognise that the orthodox policy that has been pursued by the Government of reducing interest rates to curb monetary growth when it gets too high is the right policy. I remember many comments from Opposition Members and from others outside the House over the past year or two that, on their own, interest rates were not a suitable means of countering inflationary pressures. However, in the past they have always done what they were meant to do, for the simple reason that they go to the heart of tackling excess monetary growth. If one raises interest rates, one makes spending more expensive and saving more rewarding. If one wants to act on both ends of the problem by encouraging people to save and discouraging people to spend, a rise in interest rates is not only the best way but virtually the only way of satisfactorily doing so.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about Budgets of recent years. In particular, he drew our attention to what he said in 1988. Over the past few years, the Government and successive Conservative Chancellors have achieved substantial surpluses on the fiscal balance. They have not only eliminated the public sector borrowing requirement, which, in the days of the Labour Government, used to be the great bogey of economic management, but have achieved a series of surpluses in the Budget each year so that monetary policy was fortified by fiscal policy. That has had the advantage not only of encouraging a sound base for the economy but of creating a major achievement in the repayment of public debt, which is valuable. It enables money to be spent on more deserving areas of public expenditure and it also relieves a burden from future generations that should never have been placed upon them.

The Labour party criticises recent Government Budgets, but that criticism is economically wrong and demonstrates that it has a strange sense of priorities. Such criticism is even more amiss when one considers the Labour party's record. It has always been anxious to increase public expenditure. Every time an election is on the horizon, Opposition Members go around trying to find new ways in which to increase public expenditure, because they believe that their party will be popular if they intend to spend money on this and that. They never explain how they would pay for such expenditure, but we know. They would do so partly through higher borrowing, which forces interest rates up and encourages inflation, and by increasing taxation. We know that, because that is what they did in the past.

I remember well my first election campaign when I was returned to the House. Then, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was going around the country saying that he wanted to squeeze the rich until the pips squeaked. He sought to pay for the extravagant Labour programme of increased public expenditure by imposing taxes on higher earnings. However, in the second half of the 1970s, when the right hon. Gentleman was Chancellor, the rich became everyone other than those on supplementary benefit. The tax burden was increased not only for those on higher rates of income tax but for all on the basic rate. The squeeze that the right hon. Gentleman imposed on taxpayers then should be a warning to anyone who now believes that a Labour Government would not increase taxes for those on ordinary levels of income.

The Government's current economic strategy is just about correct. I say "just about", because I do not believe anyone could say with precision when the necessary steps in monetary and fiscal policy to manage the economy out of a period of slower growth back to the sustainable level of growth of the 1980s should be taken.

The House should recall that, in 1981, a Conservative Chancellor was heavily criticised by 364 economists—my right hon. Friend the present Chancellor referred to them—and by many others in this House and outside for maintaining a tight fiscal policy and tight monetary conditions at a time when the economy had slowed down rapidly. We were told that if we maintained that posture the only possible outcome would be a deeper and longer recession from which the economy would never be able to recover. I remember those circumstances especially well because I happened to be the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then Chancellor. I also remember that it was not long after that 1981 Budget that the economic recovery began. That confused all the great pundits who said that that could never happen. My right hon. Friend and his successor, now our Prime Minister, were right to be cautious about being hurried into reducing interest rates or easing the fiscal policy to give the economy an artificial boost. That is the last thing that is suited to our current economic circumstances, as it would be the quickest way to renew the inflationary pressures that have caused our present difficulties.

Since August there has been increasing evidence that the economy has been slowing down in the way the Government intended. Figures for monetary growth now suggest that inflationary pressures have significantly abated. The latest figures for M0 suggest that it is hardly growing and, on an annual basis, it is well within its band. The figures for M4 are also falling. The figures relating to retail sales, especially pre-Christmas sales in the high streets, and the message from industry suggest that the excessive growth in the economy in the past two years is now being corrected. From here on, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have the task to manage the economy in such a way as to return us to sustainable growth within the framework of the exchange rate mechanism.

The ERM, however, imposes disciplines that are not always understood. In the past, interest rate policy could be determined almost solely in terms of domestic considerations, but now the exchange rate will also act as a guide and constraint. It is perfectly correct that that should be so. I noted the important passage in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech today when he said that we had no early plans to change from the wider 6 per cent. band to the narrow 2¼ per cent. band. That is a wise decision, because if we move to the narrow band in the near future it would constrain my right hon. Friend's ability to deal with changing economic conditions and monetary policy needs at a time when we are moving from a period of disequilibrium to one of sustainable growth. If we move to that narrow band now, during that period of transition, constraints could be placed on my right hon. Friend that might be against the interests of our domestic economy.

The main danger against which my right hon. Friend must guard is increasing recessionary pressures more than inflationary ones. Until three months ago there was a danger that inflationary pressures would revive quickly. I now believe, however, that that is no longer the case. In the next few months it will be possible to reduce interest rates as the inflation rate comes down. My right hon. Friend, as Chancellor, cannot make immediate forecasts about such matters, but when the retail prices index is published at the end of this week I expect it to show a significant reduction and to be down to single figures. I also expect the figures for the underlying rate of inflation to show that it has also passed its peak. Those circumstances, coupled with the evidence concerning the money supply, suggest that a reduction in inflation and a reduction in interest rates are appropriate.

My right hon. Friend should be cautious, however, not to follow the advice of the Opposition who want a dramatic reduction in interest rates from what they describe as their present crippling levels. Such a sudden change would be counter productive, as it would risk setting off the type of inflationary pressures with which we have grappled in the past two years. That would not be in the economic and political interests of the country.

Much of the comment that one reads these days suggests that my right hon. Friend and other Treasury Ministers are motivated purely by the political calendar when taking economic decisions. I am absolutely sure that that is not so. That charge was levelled against my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when, as Chancellor, he reduced interest rates by 1 per cent. in October. I have no doubt that the economic conditions justified that reduction from the high level of 15 per cent. As and when my right hon. Friend the present Chancellor judges it right, I am confident that he will reduce interest rates. He will do so, however, only when he judges it to be consistent with managing the economy back to sustained growth without rousing the inflationary pressures that have caused us so many difficulties in the past.

The great lesson to be drawn is that inflationary pressures will revive unless we are constantly vigilant to ensure that they do not. If there is one lesson to be learnt

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from the episode of 1988 it is that we must watch at all times for all the economic indicators—not only money supply but asset values and many other signs from which to judge the level of activity in the economy. If there are signs of overheating, the sooner a response is made through interest rates, even though that may be unpopular in the short run, the better it will be for the economy. And what is best for the economy is no doubt the best for the party of Government in due course. So I encourage my right hon. Friend to stay on that course.

It is essential for the future prosperity of this country that we do not have another Labour Government. I thought that we might perhaps have heard some more this afternoon about the Opposition's approach to economic management, but I suspect that I was not the only Conservative Member who was not surprised when nothing was forthcoming. If the Opposition spell out their economic policies in great detail between now and the next election, I hope that they will be candid about them. When promising to spend £X billion on certain areas of public expenditure—education, training, schools, roads or housing—they must explain how they will finance them. Unless they spell out how they will finance the extra expenditure that they tend to promise at this time in a Parliament and in election campaigns, they will be no more credible than they were in the past three general elections.

There has been some speculation that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East would be a more credible Leader of the Opposition than the present leader. In some respects that is a sensible view. Although his speech was devoid of content, at least it showed a vigour of presentation and an amusing turn of phrase here and there. The difference between the shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the Opposition is that the latter does not know what he is talking about but is very willing to talk about it, while the former knows quite a lot—enough not to talk about it at all.

Under these circumstances, the country is fortunate not to have a Labour Government, with their high taxes and high spending policies, to deal with inflationary pressures now and for a long time to come. We are fortunate to have my right hon. Friend, with whom I had the privilege of working in the Treasury, for whom I have a high personal regard and whom the country can count itself lucky to have as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

5.13 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) on a most moving and eloquent maiden speech, in the course of which she probably made many friends on both sides of the House and made friends with their families because of her understanding of what the families of Members of Parliament have to endure due to the peculiar ways in which the House operates. Her constituency must be proud that one family has produced two such able representatives.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I are old sparring partners. He shadowed me when I was at the Department of Industry; I shadowed him when he was at the Department of Trade and Industry. We rarely agreed but we remained friends. I have bad news for my hon. Friends: what we heard today was one of the right hon. Gentleman's more scintillating performances.

I was somewhat concerned to hear the Chancellor repeat the Prime Minister's phrase that we want an opportunity society. I well remember sitting in this Chamber 11 years ago listening to the then Chancellor presenting the first Budget of the incoming Thatcher Government. In his speech he declared that he had just given his opportunity Budget. That opportunity cost us 23 per cent. inflation, 3 million unemployed, the destruction of 20 per cent. of our manufacturing industry and the loss of 30 per cent. of manufacturing investment. So I am not sure whether the country can stand too many Conservative opportunities.

The fact that we are holding this debate is a demostration of this. We are discussing, according to the motion, a recession. I wish I were convinced of that. I suspect that we are beginning a return to a syndrome—to the stop-go cycles of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s under both Administrations——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend, but I should like to advise the House that the monitor shows a Mr. Robert Hughes speaking. Neither I nor the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is speaking, so perhaps the monitor could be corrected.

Mr. Williams: As the hon. Member who has been credited with my speech—my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)—is the only other Member sponsored by the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, I am delighted. I am happy that what I have to say should be credited to him——

Mr. Robert Hughes: The monitor has my name on it.

Mr. Williams: My Friend is to be congratulated on his eyesight, and I apologise to him if anything that I am about to say causes him embarrassment.

Members on both sides of the House know, even if they will not admit it for political reasons, that we should not be discussing a recession. After £130 billion worth of production from the North sea, we should not find ourselves fearing a return to recession and to a cycle of recession. We should be entering a period of continuous golden growth, high investment and high earnings. If someone came to a surgery of a Conservative Member —that is, if Conservative Members hold surgeries—and said that he had won the football pools 10 years before, sold his business, remortgaged his house, lived it up and had a great time for 10 years but was now down on his uppers, I wonder how much sympathy he would receive from a Conservative Member. None at all, I suspect. Yet that is exactly what the Government have done. They picked up the £130 billion output, sold off the family business and spent the money, remortgaged—and they are still in trouble, as is the country.

If the seven—or eight, as the Chancellor would claim —fat oil years are over, the stores are empty for the seven lean years to come. But the Government have squandered more than just money—which, admittedly, they have squandered on a profligate scale. They have also squandered the one and only opportunity that we have had in the post-war period to break away from the inexorable stop-go cycle and to break into a virtuous spiral

of continuous growth and high investment. The only chance that we have had, a chance given us by oil, has been wasted: hence today's debate.

Sad to say, we are not talking about one downturn in isolation. The pattern is all too familiar. I see that the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) is in his place. He and I debated economic issues on many occasions in the 1960s and 1970s. We both entered the House in 1964. We recognise that what is happening now is a similar downturn in investment and in research and training. All the symptoms were described by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). It is a familiar pattern of returning to stop—the stop that has haunted each post-war Government.

When the Chancellor shadowed the Department of Industry in which I was a Minister, he used to despise what we called the industrial strategy, My hon. Friends who were in the House at the time will remember what it was. It had to do with preparing to take finite resources from the North sea and turning them into investment in our manufacturing industry. The right hon. Gentleman used to bleat about the appalling burden that that placed on business. For the equivalent of 1p on the standard rate of tax, under section 8 of the Industry Act 1979 alone when we left office there was £2·5 billion of manufacturing investment in the pipeline. That was a record level for the post-war period. Unfortunately, it was thrown away.

The abandonment of the industrial strategy led to the waste of Britain's finite resource. None of it was invested where it was needed for the long-term benefit of the country. Instead of using those resources for investment, the Government cut manufacturing investment to a level that was the equivalent of having stopped all manufacturing investment for three of the last 10 years. The well-established shortfall for failing to maintain the 1979 level of investment is £20 billion, and that would have created a new Nissan plant every other year. That illustrates the scale of investment if the Government had maintained the level that they inherited.

When the Chancellor and I switched places and I was shadowing him, we were in a Committee which sought to abolish the regional development grants. At that time the Chancellor said that the trouble with the Opposition was that they were "dewy-eyed" about manufacturing. I have never forgotten that phrase. He saw the future in services, but it is a pity that at that stage in his career he did not shed a few tears for manufacturing industry. If he had, perhaps he would not have destroyed one fifth of our manufacturing base.

The nonsense of the comparison between services and manufacturing is revealed by the balance of payments mess. A chain of takeaway restaurants may be very successful, but it in no way contributes to easing the balance of payments problem. However, workshops producing goods that would otherwise be imported or producing goods for export do make a contribution to solving that problem. That is the fallacy of the Government's argument.

The Chancellor boasted about our manufacturing trade balance having improved somewhat. He boasts about turning what the Government called an inefficient manufacturing industry which earned a surplus of £6 billion on international trade into an efficient manufacturing industry which contributes to a deficit of £6 billion. That is a peculiar triumph. We cannot afford the Government's successes; they are too costly. If we have many more such successes, the country will be bankrupted.

The Chancellor makes great play of the discipline of the ERM and says that the Opposition do not understand it. The right hon. Gentleman does not understand that there would be more discipline if the industry that the Government have destroyed had remained, because discipline is concentrated on industries that are affected by international trade through overseas competition and the need to export. Because the Government destroyed so much of our manufacturing base, the discipline that the Chancellor talks about, the screwing down of the economy as a result of our membership of the ERM, impinges on only one fifth of Britain's employment. If that is the discipline that the right hon. Gentleman thinks will on its own inevitably produce the turnaround that he wants, I have news for him: it will take rather a long time.

The Sunday Times said that entering the ERM was the Government's golden scenario. It spoke about the protection offered by the ERM, the fall of inflation and interest rates, GATT and the timing of an election. I see the same sequence of events, and I shall shortly deal with them, but I see them not as a golden scenario but as the Government's desperate and only scenario. They have no other ace to play. Membership of the ERM was the only economic option left to them and they had to gamble on it. They have to hope that the play-off between what I shall call the political economy and the real economy will work in their favour in the middle of next year.

The real economy shows soaring bankruptcies, unemployment increasing by more than 500,000, falling investment and lower expenditure on research. The indicators are plummeting. They are all on red alert. However, the political economic indicators will for a while be favourable to the Government. Inflation will fall, not because the Government have done anything right but because they have not repeated last year's mistakes. As last year's mistakes fall out of the index, which shows just the rate of increase and not an improvement in inflation, merely a change in the rate of growth in inflation, it will seem to move in the Government's favour. The Government hope, and the Chancellor has made clear, that as a result of that they will be able to reduce interest rates. By so doing they hope to be able to reduce mortgage rates.

In a previous speech in the House I said that a cut in the mortgage interest rate of 3 percentage points is equivalent to an income tax cut of 3 percentage points because it releases £6 billion of purchasing power. For the Government, that has the great advantage of efficiency because, instead of costing them that amount in lost tax revenue, it costs them only £1·5 billion under MIRAS that they lose on mortgages. However, that is a tangent. If the Government achieve what they want, which is what most commentators accept as the possibility of a change in interest rates, then for a limited period they will inject back into the economy £6 billion of purchasing power which they hope will see them through the next election.

The Chancellor referred to the £3 billion by which the Government hope to reduce overseas loans this year. They do not need to pay that and, if necessary, that money is available to the Chancellor in the Budget. My hon. Friends should be aware that that money may be available as a political ploy. The Government advance strange arguments. They see it as a virtue to pay back money that they

[Mr. Williams]

borrowed at stable low-interest rates, but they do not seem to understand that that leaves us increasingly dependent on hot money, the £30 billion to £40 billion at volatile interest rates which plays the market and which has flooded into the country. It is not the ERM that has trapped us with high interest rates but that hot money which the Government must keep in Britain. If it were not for the volatility and the fear that private investment in Britain would rush out, the Government could have the interest rates that they need. They talk about paying off debt, but the only way in which they can finance their deficit on overseas trade is by massive private debt.

The Government hope that they will have the chance of an election before the situation turns grim. Money will go into the mortgage holders' pockets and then into the shops, creating a temporary uplift in demand. But one third of it will go overseas and an extra £2 billion worth of imports will flood in. Towards the end of next year, the balance of payments position, the interest rate position and the rate of inflation will all worsen.

We have to ask the Government what will happen if the so-called golden scenario does not work out. The pound is perilously low within the allowable thresholds. If the interest rates that they are assuming in their autumn statement do not turn out as they have predicted, we shall be discussing a movement not into recession but into a full-scale slump. There is a danger that we shall move from the oil-plentiful 1980s into the dismal 1990s.

I do not care what Ministers have said: we moved into the ERM at the wrong rate. The Chancellor of the Exchequer told the Treasury Select Committee, if I understood the newspaper reports—my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) was there—that the rate was right because we had gone in at about the average in relation to the exchange rate with the deutschmark over the past 10 years. On what does he base that as evidence of it being right? Over the past 10 years, we have ended up with a trade deficit of £20 billion, despite the fact that we had £130 billion worth of North sea oil to replace imports or to sell abroad. Therefore, what he calls the right level in relation to the deutschmark means that, far from being able to pay our way, we have been living above our long-term means at the rate of £150 billion over 10 years. That is the gap that needs to be made up. What nonsensical assessment leads the Chancellor to think that the level against the deutschmark that led to a deficit of £150 billion can lead to the breakout into the growth economy that he claims that he wants?

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): If the right hon. Gentleman feels that we went in at the wrong rate, what does he think would be the appropriate rate?

Mr. Williams: Approximately 10 per cent. lower would have been right. As hon. Gentlemen will know, the assessments made by industry of the uncompetitiveness of British manufacturing when compared to our competitors overseas led the CBI to believe that approximately 10 per cent. below the present level would be the right one.

We are talking about, and making points against each other about, a single rate. If we were to adopt as a single rate the level of exchange established as a central position of the ERM, we should condemn ourselves to a return to an immediate post-war trend. When the war ended, for prestige reasons, because the pound was the international medium of exchange, we tied ourselves to an historical rate against the dollar that was unrelated to the economic realities of the trading positions of the United States and Britain. Hon. Members will remember that every Thursday everyone would go to read the tapes at midday to see whether the bank rate had gone up or gone down and to see what the latest jump or change in the interest rates was as we tried to sustain our sterling level against the presssure of international speculators. That happened under Governments of both parties.

There are limited hopes of short-term recovery. Last week, I discussed with an ex-official of mine—we had together dealt with inward investment and spent a lot of time working abroad talking to overseas business men—investment in Britain. I found salutary and saddening a comment that he made about the future of investment. He is now with one of the major heavy industrial companies. He said that, if there were an upturn, his company would want to sustain the quality of existing plant but that if it were to expand and invest more, it was not sure about investing in Britain.

The logic of what has happened in eastern Europe is that Japanese and American capital, know-how and technology will move there because of low wage levels. Britain will not be able to compete in domestic manufacturing. His fear was that heavy industry, engineering and so on, would have to look to investment overseas. In the 1970s, the Benelux triangle was the black hole that drew in most of the petrochemical investment in Europe, and my friend predicted that what is happening in eastern Europe, as German and Japanese capital goes in, will lead to a similar situation with manufacturing capability moving eastwards across Europe, particularly if eastern European countries become members of the EEC, as many of us hope they will.

The Chancellor—to mix my metaphors somewhat oddly—as an ex-Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry, has found some of his dead ducks coming home to roost. He is now finding that what he helped to kill while in the Department of Trade and Industry is coming back to haunt him, particularly the industry that he destroyed. The country must mourn the fact that what we have lost is our one opportunity—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) may find this funny, but I have served in four Departments, and the hon. Gentleman and I have followed economic issues for many years. No one has been able to break the stop-go pattern, and the eventual historical assessment of the past 10 years will be that an opportunity existed but was wasted.

5.37 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) on her admirable maiden speech. It used to be said that a maiden speech should be uncontroversial, but I detected some controversial words and phrases in her speech, and I thought all the more of it for that. However, I greatly regret that there were not more hon. Gentlemen here to listen to her speech. I am sure that it will read well. I regret that the length of the speech made by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) probably had something to do with the fact that there are not enough

hon. Gentlemen present to keep the debate going. I wish that there had been, to hear the admirable speech of the hon. Lady.

I am surprised that there are not more hon. Gentlemen here to listen to and take part in this important debate on the recession. I should have thought that both sides of the House would be crowded, especially as the terms of the motion are savage in their condemnation of the Government's policy. For example, it

"calls upon the Government to lower the crippling level of interest rates".

As we heard from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), it has long been the Opposition's policy that Britain should be a member of the exchange rate mechanism. Knowing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman understands a good deal about the ERM and knowing our place in the ERM at the moment, I cannot understand why he has been willing to put his name to a motion that calls for lower interest rates. Perhaps the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) can help the House, as she, too, knows where sterling stands in the ERM. It is almost at the bottom of the range, yet the motion calls on the Government to lower the "crippling" level of interest rates.

I can only assume that what is envisaged is a substantial reduction. I see that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is in his place once more, so let me ask him what effect a reduction in interest rates would have on our position in the ERM.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North) *rose*——

Sir Peter Hordern: I am not asking the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Allen: I would love to help the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Peter Hordern: The hon. Gentleman does not speak on this subject with the same expertise as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. I have enormous admiration for him, but not on economic matters. But I should be quite happy to defer to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East should he wish to intervene. [HON. MEMBERS: "Unfair."] Hon. Members say that the question is unfair, and I understand that, but I still do not see how Opposition Members can justify lowering interest rates, given our position in the ERM at the moment. The truth is that it cannot be done, and it is perfectly phoney to suggest that it can.

I do not think that any of my hon. Friends would deny that we are in a recession, whether shallow or deep. But we have started from a very high level after eight years of uninterrupted growth. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West said that he and I could recall many instances of stop-go, and we can. But I do not ever recollect an eight-year period of go, and it is therefore not surprising that there should be some slowdown.

Mr. Alan Williams: What about North sea oil?

Sir Peter Hordern: The right hon. Gentleman reminds me that he said during his speech that we had had the benefit of £130 billion-worth of North sea oil.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And a lot more debts.

Sir Peter Hordern: I shall come to the question of debt a little later. First, let me concentrate on the question of the £130 billion-worth of revenue from North sea oil. I often wonder why the Opposition do not recognise, and speak proudly about, the purchase and acquisition of overseas assets by British companies during the past 10 years. In case hon. Members are not immediately aware of the figures, I remind them that we have invested £150 billion all over the world—a good deal of it in the United States—from which we are deriving a substantial benefit. We have more per capita invested overseas than any other country, not excluding Japan, and certainly not excluding the United States. So, from the point of view of assets, we are substantially better off than we have ever been.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that we have repaid Labour's debts has been immeasurably beneficial, given the present high level of interest rates? If we had not done that, the outflow of funds would be enormous.

Sir Peter Hordern: As always, my hon. Friend makes a perspicacious observation. She is absolutely right, and I shall be returning to the question of debt a little later.

Mr. Alan Williams: The hon. Gentleman made a point about investment overseas. Asset value is meaningless, because the assets are not realisable. They are of value to Britain only if companies refund and repatriate the profit. Most companies are using the money in the host countries or re-investing there. That means that we have exported not only our capital but our jobs.

Sir Peter Hordern: The right hon. Gentleman does not appear to appreciate what happens when one invests abroad: one receives dividends and a return on those investments. That is the position today, and we are reaping enormous rewards from our investments which will last us and our successors for generations to come. We are in an extremely strong position.

Our capital investment during the past few years has not been confined to overseas investments alone. To hear Opposition Members speak, one would think that there had been no capital investment in this country for the past few years. In 1983, the total fixed capital formation in Britain was £53 billion; last year, it was £81 billion. It is only marginally down on that figure this year, so we are talking about a high level of domestic fixed capital formation.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to what the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said during his brave but failed bid for the premiership. The right hon. Gentleman made it plain that one of his great concerns was the substantial fall in manufacturing investment in Britain. He said that we could not depend on service industries for our wealth and that the Government had to intervene in industry. What has changed? Or perhaps that is why the right hon. Gentleman has been made Secretary of State for the Environment.

Sir Peter Hordern: During his election campaign and long before it, my right hon. Friend spoke of the marriage of private and public sector investment in the inner cities, and in Liverpool in particular. My right hon. Friend has a very good policy which he advanced extremely well.

Capital investment in Britain has increased substantially during the past few years. Moreover, Britain has acted as a strong magnet to overseas investment, not least in the motor industry but in many other industries too. I understand that, in the past few years, we have attracted

[Sir Peter Hordern]

more investment than any other European country. That being so, the Labour party is in no position to criticise us for our lack of capital investment.

It is perfectly true that, in terms of unemployment, the outlook is not good, but, given that there are now 2 million more people at work than there were in 1979, it is rather short-sighted of Labour Members to criticise us.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor admitted, if anything, growth in Britain has been a bit too quick. It could not have been sustained. For a long time, monetary aggregates had shown that demand was increasing too fast, and that credit, especially, was being advanced far too far. In 1985, for example, bank lending amounted to £20 billion. It rose to £60 billion in the four years to 1989. That progression was far too fast for comfort.

I confess that I do not see an easy time ahead. In terms of disposable income, there is no question but that young people—especially those with large mortgages—are feeling the effect of high interest rates acutely. There are no exemptions. We are not talking about a north-south divide; young people with large mortgages in my constituency are being squeezed hard. It is perfectly true that, on top of that, they have to put up with the community charge. One of the difficulties of the charge is its unpredictability. No one can say what it will be from one year to the next, and it is very difficult for people to manage.

Having said all that, I believe that, unlike other recessions that I have known, this is a perfectly manageable recession, because it is a private sector phenomenon and has not been brought about by an imbalance in the public sector. Matters were very different in 1979, as my hon. Friends will well remember. In 1979, the public sector borrowing requirement accounted for 15 per cent. of all revenue from tax and national insurance contributions. That is an enormous proportion. Because of that large public sector borrowing requirement, the private sector was badly squeezed.

I looked carefully at the Opposition's motion, as the House would expect. It calls not only for a reduction in the "crippling level of interest rates"—

it does not say how the Opposition would achieve that —but calls upon the Government

"to reverse the cuts in public investment in training and support for industry, and to promote the modernisation of British industry through the application of new technologies, the adoption of a sustained programme of regional industrial development".

All those items would involve a substantial increase in public expenditure, and we have every right to ask how that money would be raised. Would it be through higher taxes or through more extensive borrowing? How can a programme of higher borrowing be sustained at a time of high interest rates?

Perhaps the most difficult thing of all to understand —although by no means unique—is the Opposition's programme to renationalise water and electricity, which are two firm commitments. How will that programme be financed? The Opposition do not say at what price the shares in electricity and water companies will be renationalised. It may be a low price—we simply do not know. If it is, it would be an absolute disgrace.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): A great deal of money is involved.

Sir Peter Hordern: The hon. Gentleman is right. How would the Opposition raise such a large sum of money? They would have to add that borrowing to the already large public sector borrowing. That would be inevitable, given the Opposition's large public sector programme. It is an incredible programme. The private sector would not give the Opposition any credibility, either now or during a general election, because the Opposition's programme is incredible——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Wait and see.

Sir Peter Hordern: We will indeed see.

The Government must control total public expenditure or there will be too high a burden on the private sector. I include local authority expenditure within the total of public expenditure, because that is how it is treated in the public sector accounts—and it is right that it should be. However hard we try, it is extraordinarily difficult to control local authority expenditure by any rational means without bludgeoning and capping local authorities. It is clear that the increase in local government expenditure during the past few years is unsustainable.

Part of the Opposition's programme is a commitment to increase expenditure on education. It is clear that, if we allow more money to go to the schools, and if additional funding must be raised through the community charge, the penalty through the community charge will be far too high. There is a strong case for transferring the cost of education from local government to the state. That should be carefully considered during the current review of the community charge. There is an excellent case for doing so, because there is now a national curriculum. Local education authorities can manage such a system, but the Government should be responsible for paying for the programme. I agree with the Opposition that education is a priority, and that we cannot ignore it.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I agree with my hon. Friend about education. Will he say more about the implications for income tax?

Sir Peter Hordern: I have seen some estimates for that. My understanding is that, if education were immediately transferred to the central budget, that would cost 3p or 4p in the pound. However, much more important, if we take into account how much money will be taken out of people's pockets—that is, if we combine the cost of the community charge with income tax—the position is nowhere near as bad. It would halve the cost of the community charge. It is a serious national priority which should be carefully considered.

There are a number of supply side matters to which we should pay careful attention, and in particular the importance of the GATT negotiations that have been imperilled by the negotiations about the common agricultural policy. I am beginning to think that the negotiations on the CAP are too important to be dealt with by Agriculture Ministers. They should be confined to Trade Ministers. I do not even believe that the CAP really helps farmers, which is what it is supposed to do. The GATT negotiations are more important than the preservation of the CAP, and I hope that, by one means or another, we get rid of it.

I want to say a word about the role of interest rates. Some people say not only that they are far too high but

that we are far too dependent upon them. It is likely that, compared with the rate of inflation, interest rates will remain somewhat higher than we have been accustomed to since the war. We may be entering a period of conditions that we have not experienced for 50 years, with the rentier coming into his own. In other words, the real rate of return on interest will be higher than the rate of inflation—something that has not occurred for a long time.

Because of our position in the exchange rate mechanism, it is important that the retail prices index should be properly compared with that of other countries. Investors outside this country look to the real rate of return, which is the difference between the rate of inflation and the rate of interest offered. Our RPI should be on a basis comparable to that of other European countries. That would result in a significant reduction, which would help our position within the European Community and within the ERM.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, there is a certain prospect of lower inflation followed, in due course, by lower interest rates. Reports of an economic collapse, which have been suggested by the Opposition, are rather like the reported death of Mark Twain—greatly exaggerated. We have every reason to look forward to a better period, with lower interest rates and lower inflation. Nevertheless, I think that the recession may be rather longer than has been our experience with previous recessions, but I am confident that my right hon. Friend's handling of the economy, and the courage that he and his predecessor brought to the task by keeping interest rates uncomfortably high, is the right approach to the central priority of reducing inflation.

5.58 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I am delighted to have caught your eye so soon after my arrival in the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is fitting that I should have an opportunity to make my maiden speech during a debate about the recession, because it has hit my constituents very hard.

I thank those hon. Members who worked so hard to ensure my election to the House and those hon. Members, on both sides of the House who welcomed me here and offered me advice about my maiden speech. The most common piece of advice was that I should ignore all advice and that is what I have chosen to do.

I know that it is the convention of the House for a new Member to pay tribute to his predecessor. Even if that had not been the convention, I would have chosen to do so. I know that I speak for all hon. Members when I pay tribute to Norman Buchan, a man who was loved by many and respected by all. During his 26 years in the House, he touched the lives of many people here, in his constituency and elsewhere. He was a man of great principle, warmth and intellect and, as many hon. Members will know, before he entered the House he was a teacher. He used his great skills of communication to inspire and encourage others and I think that it is fair to say that he was always the teacher.

Many hon. Members will also know that Norman Buchan had a passion for the arts, especially Scottish folk music. The most fitting tribute that I can pay him is to quote from a song about him. It is in characteristic dialect, but that enriches it rather than detracts from it.

"He's a fighter, he's a dancer
He's freedom's greatest fan
When the chips are doon
Yon Buchan loon
Wee Norman is your man."

That is how many of us remember him.

The constituency of Paisley, South, which I have inherited from Norman Buchan, needed and needs the kind of representation that he provided, because it is a microcosm of industrial Scotland and the problems that beset it. I have lived in the constituency all my life and I started work there too. I remember the bus journey that I used to take from my home town of Johnstone to my work in Paisley early every morning. It was quite a job to get on a bus 15 years ago. The streets were throbbing and bustling with people all going to work in the mills and the large factories. A school leaver taking that same bus journey today would see decay, dereliction and despondency.

Paisley is famous for the Paisley pattern. It is known throughout the world and it was at the forefront of the textile industry which employed many thousands of people from the town and surrounding areas. Now it employs no more than a few hundred. The massive mills that once housed those thousands of workers now stand as idle and rotting monuments of the industrial decline that we have seen during the past decade.

It is sad and shameful that there is no large-scale manufacture of any Paisley pattern goods in the town of Paisley. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) referred to the need for partnership; the need to explore new markets, to invest in research and development and in export drives. There is great potential there for that.

There is also in the constituency the village of Elderslie, the birthplace of the Scottish patriot, William Wallace. It is also the home of Stoddards, the carpet manufacturer which produces some of the highest quality carpets in the world. I am sure that those carpets grace some of the corridors of this place.

Johnstone, my home town, also has a rich industrial heritage. It was the home of the first machine tool foundry in the world. It trained men who could twist and turn metal at will into useful components. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case, because no major factory does such work any longer.

When I was considering material for my maiden speech I referred to the maiden speech made by my predecessor in 1964. In that speech, Norman Buchan referred to the new industrial complex of Rootes and Pressed Steel, which is now in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham). That, too, has now closed and many people who lost their jobs there have never worked since. Those people have been stripped of the dignity of being able to make their full contribution to society and to the economy.

Male unemployment in the constituency was 11·7 per cent. in October. That meant that 2,754 people competed for 420 jobs, many of which were low-paid and part-time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) said, in the past few weeks we have seen the closure of the Howdens factory in Renfrew, once a market leader in the production of equipment for renewable energy—something which is taking off all over the world in these days when environmentally friendly products are all the rage. That factory closed, making 500 people redundant, because there was none of the investment in research and development and export drives which Howdens' competitors received from their Governments.

[Mr. Gordon McMaster]

However, I must pay tribute to the regeneration of the economy by the local authorities, the Scottish Development Agency and some of the business community in Renfrew district. We see the lunar landscape of the Talbot factory being regenerated to breathe new life into the area. It has been turned into a retail industrial and residential development and that is welcome. Renfrew district, and Paisley in particular, is bidding to make our area the home of Scotland's national stadium. If any Conservative Member would like some advice on how to stay out of Europe, I am sure that such advice could be obtained from the supporters of St. Mirren. It would be only natural for that national stadium to come to the home of St. Mirren.

In conclusion, I want to make a suggestion that would have a major social and economic impact in my constituency. In 1979, when the Government took office, 34 per cent. of Renfrew district's housing budget was paid by the Exchequer in the form of a housing support grant. We have not had a housing support grant for many years. If that grant were restored to its former level of 34 per cent., £11 million would be put into the local economy which would improve homes, reduce homelessness, create jobs and stimulate the local economy.

6.6 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on an outstanding maiden speech. Like him, I was elected to the House at a by-election and I recall the apprehension with which I made my maiden speech. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the confidence with which he made his.

I remember Norman Buchan well because he was one of the first Labour Members of Parliament whom I met after I came into the House in April 1977. We appeared together on "Panorama". One of the issues during my by-election —this demonstrates that times do not change greatly—was rising prices and inflation. It was thought that I must be some sort of expert on the subject and I was drafted on to "Panorama" as a young and rather green Tory Member. Needless to say, Norman Buchan outpointed me completely.

The electors of Paisley, North and Paisley, South are fortunate in the representatives whom they have sent to the House. We look forward to listening to the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South with the greatest respect. I congratulate them both.

If it is the Opposition's duty to criticise the Government's economic policy, Conservative Members are equally entitled to examine carefully the Opposition's motion to try to establish precisely what the Opposition would do to rectify the current situation. There is not a great deal of dispute about the fact that the economy has slowed down substantially. We all have businesses in our constituency and talk to local business men. We all know what the situation is. I was talking to my local chamber of commerce only last night. We all know that there has been a substantial slowdown in the economy since the summer. The question that the House must consider is what is the right way to tackle the problems that we now face.

The Opposition argue that we should have a substantial cut in interest rates. That is the implication of their use of the word "crippling" in their motion. They also argue that we should increase spending on training and support for industry, apply new technologies, adopt a programme of regional industrial development and increase the provision of education and training—all involving more public spending. Yet the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) tells us that Labour's only firm public spending commitments at present are to increase child benefit and retirement pensions, which, she explains, would be paid for by higher taxation. We understand that, but, if higher economic growth is not possible without an increase in public spending, how can it be secured by a Labour Government who have made a commitment not to spend in that way initially, but only to increase child benefit and retirement pensions? There is a conundrum here——

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Smith: —which the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is about to explain.

Mr. Allen: Is the hon. Gentleman admitting that, when we win the general election—perhaps early in the new year —we shall be taking over an economy that is not growing?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not listened to what I have been saying. I have already said that we all know, from talking to business men in our constituencies, that the economy has slowed right down. I doubt whether it is growing at present; it is impossible to tell for certain, but, according to my local chamber of commerce, the position has changed radically since the summer. There is no doubt about that.

I represent a prosperous area with a high employment level. I am told that the Gerrards Cross post office is now fully staffed: that is the bellwether test in my constituency, and shows that the economy has slowed down. There is normally a shortage of labour in my area, and the post office finds it difficult to recruit. But I do not think that that is the point at issue; the point at issue, surely, is what is the right way to tackle the problems. There are only two ways in which we can establish what a Labour Government—if we have the misfortune to have another —would do: one is to examine current statements and the motion that we are discussing, and the other is to examine the record of Labour Governments.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was a Minister in the Labour Government who produced the highest inflation and the highest public sector borrowing requirement that the country has ever experienced and also presided over a fall of 2·5 per cent. in manufacturing output.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I do not like to hear my hon. Friend criticising the previous Labour Administration in that way. We know that he would not have won Ashfield and I would not have won Workington if that Administration had been a success.

Mr. Smith: I suppose that every cloud has a silver lining: I concede that my hon. Friend and I were both beneficiaries of the Labour Government's inability to manage the economy. It would not have been possible to overturn a Labour majority of 23,000 in my case, and, in my hon. Friend's case——

Mr. Page: A mere 10,000.

Mr. Smith: —had the Government of the day not been deeply unpopular.

Let me return to the present day. Some have suggested that nothing has been achieved over the past 11 years and that the current recession is in some way similar to that of the early 1980s. I believe that anyone who knows anything about the real economy will understand that the underlying economy has been transformed—that it is far stronger than it was 11 years ago. Over that period, average growth has been 30 per cent. faster than the OECD average. Manufacturing productivity has increased substantially: the gap per worker between the United Kingdom and Germany was 37 per cent. in 1980, and is now down to 8 per cent. The growth of the smaller businesses is also very significant. The past decade has seen a substantial shift in employment patterns.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): What about large businesses?

Mr. Smith: That is exactly the point that I am about to make. Large businesses used to be the principal employers —*[Interruption.]* Let me explain the position to hon. Members who seem to be having some difficulty in understanding. In 1979, companies employing fewer than 200 people employed 27 per cent. of the work force. By 1986, the figure had risen to 36 per cent. Companies employing more than 500 people were employing 43 per cent. of the work force in 1979, but by 1986 the figure had fallen to 29 per cent. That shows the way in which the economy has diversified and demonstrates the vibrant growth of small businesses. More evidence is provided by the VAT registration figures, which show a constant growth over the past decade in the number of businesses registered for VAT. Even in 1989, the number of registered businesses grew by 5 per cent.

Mr. Allen: I thought that the theory was that the small businesses would proliferate and that some would be so successful that they would become big businesses. In that case, surely the figures for big business should be higher.

Mr. Smith: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. There are many more small businesses than there were 10 years ago. Of course some will eventually become large businesses; many were formed relatively recently. The point is that, while in many constituencies—sadly—a large proportion of the work force used to be dependent on a single employer, there are now many employers. That must surely be more satisfactory from everyone's point of view.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): That is because some of the large companies have undertaken massive redundancy programmes owing to the current high interest rates.

Mr. Smith: I accept that there were many redundancies in the early 1980s, because there was substantial overmanning in many large businesses. Since then, however, manufacturing industry has become much more productive and profitable. That is one of the reasons for the substantial growth in inward investment over the past 10 years. The United Kingdom is now an attractive investment target, because it offers a low-tax regime, a deregulated economy and good labour relations, which was not the case 11 years ago. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) pointed out, overseas investment has also increased. After 30 or 40 years, the decline in Britain's share of world trade has finally been arrested. It has yet to begin to increase, but at least the decline has stopped.

There are many reasons for all these changes. One is the improved quality and professionalism of management in British industry. That is partly due to investment in the universities in the 1960s. The fact that that investment resulted in economic fruition only in the 1980s, when managers in their late 30s and early 40s were starting to take over companies and run them much more professionally, is an indication of how long it takes for changes in education and training to feed through. [AN HON. MEMBER: "We had a Labour Government then."] It may have been Labour; it may have been Conservative. My point is that it takes a long time for us to benefit from investment in education. As a result of that investment, however, we now have much better marketing services, financial control and manufacturing systems.

Another example of the success of the policies of the past 11 years is the growth in the venture capital industry, which barely existed 11 years ago. We have also seen the development of the unlisted securities market and the third market, and the encouragement of small companies on the stock exchange. In all those different respects, the economy is far stronger today than it was 11 years ago.

The underlying strength of the economy meant that the measures that we introduced two years ago, including higher interest rates, took longer to work through than anyone forecast. It is true that the Treasury got its inflation forecast wrong, but so did all other economic forecasters. We had high interest rates for two years, but the economy refused to slow down. I believe that it took longer this time because the economy was so much stronger than it was before.

We must not repeat the mistake of returning to a monetary policy that is too lax. We must continue with a firm monetary policy. The evidence is that it is now working. M0 is down and is within its target range. When the retail prices index falls, as it will on Friday, I hope that it will soon be possible to cut interest rates. I hope, too, that next year it will be possible for us to move to the narrow band within the exchange rate mechanism. I listened to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said about the timing. He may be right. If, however, we are genuinely committed to the ERM, we should move to the narrow band at an early opportunity, to provide industry with the stability that it needs to plan ahead. It wants stable exchange rates. We should, therefore, move into the narrow band as soon as it makes sense to do so.

Dr. Moonie: What evidence does the hon. Gentleman have that the narrow measure of money is an accurate reflection of what is going on in the economy?

Mr. Smith: I should have thought that the amount of notes and coins was a primary indication of the amount of money that is available. I accept, however, that it is not the only one. I am not an economics expert; I am just a poor accountant. The hon. Gentleman ought to ask an economist, but I understand that M0 is the amount of notes and coins in the economy. That seems to me to be a good primary indication of the amount of money in circulation. I accept that we must also look at wider definitions, including the amount of credit. M0 is only one indicator, but it is one of the more credible indicators.

Mr. Allen rose——

Mr. Smith: I have not yet finished my speech. I sat down because I thought that the hon. Gentleman wanted to intervene.

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman has already had 10 minutes.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Member for Swansea, West took 26 minutes. The hon. Gentleman must be patient.

As for our fiscal policy as we approach the Budget, the autumn statement suggests that there will be a public sector debt repayment this year of £3 billion. The Treasury's medium-term objective is to have a balanced Budget. As we are in a recession, it would be reasonable to aim for a balanced Budget next year. When it proves possible, I want income tax cuts to be made, but what is even more important is to find ways to encourage savings. The Prime Minister has placed great emphasis on the need to encourage savings in the 1990s if we are to fund the investment that is needed from domestic sources. I agree with him that we should endeavour to do that, if at all possible.

The problem at present is that we do not have a level fiscal playing field; it is tilted sharply in favour of owner-occupied housing. Sooner or later, the House will have to address that problem. It is not an easy one to solve. We understand the political sensitivities of mortgage interest tax relief. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North has made his views clear on that subject. He believes that it should be abolished. We need to look at it again. It costs £7 billion a year. Capital gains tax relief amounts to another £7 billion a year. We must reconsider the way in which we tax housing and compare it with the way in which we tax production investment. We must encourage people to save more and try to encourage a savings culture. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will address that issue in his Budget.

6.23 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I congratulate the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on his excellent maiden speech. I echo his words about his predecessor. He was a formidable fighter and a notable orator whose memory in the House will live for a very long time.

I congratulate also the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) on her effective maiden speech. Apart from being a good speech, it was a courageous one. As she made it, it must have brought back many memories of her husband, whose loss we also lament. It cannot have been an easy speech for her to make. I congratulate her. Her speech suggested that she will be a worthy successor to her much-lamented husband. When she spoke of people leaving Paisley in search of work, she reminded me of my great-grandfather, who was a hand loom weaver in Paisley. He moved to Glasgow to find work when major industrial change put all the hand loom weavers out of business in the 19th century. Paisley has been losing people ever since, and it still happens.

In his speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer uttered some memorable phrases. One of them will join others in the annals of political slogans that people wish they had never invented. He referred to the "equal right to become unequal". I think that it will join "On your bike" as a phrase that Conservative strategists will wish they had not been landed with. For most people, it is just the equal right to stay unequal. That is the experience of many of my constituents. The phrase will come back to haunt the Chancellor and other Conservative Ministers.

I was also struck by the Chancellor's reference to people making their own way and breaking down the barriers between the workers and the bosses. He quoted the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Her last wish was granted under the new Administration. The former Prime Minister's son, grandson and descendants for ever after will enter the social stakes with the advantage of a title to their name. The achievement of a classless society by a party that still sets great store by hereditary titles seems to me to be impossible. If one believes that people should have additional advantages at birth, through an hereditary title system, one cannot be committed to a classless society.

One of the features of the Chancellor's speech and of the debate as a whole—which is, perhaps, a surprise—is that argument across the Chamber has ceased about whether there is a recession. It is now accepted in all parts of the House that there is a recession. The only argument is about how long it will last, how deep it will be and what is its cause. The recession may not last all that long, but I suspect that it will be a deeper recession than the Government believe. It could become very much worse if events in the Gulf take a serious turn for the worse. They could have a disastrous effect on both the world economy and the economy of this country.

I believe that the recession will be quite deep. Companies now respond more quickly to recession than they did in the early 1980s. After the experience of the 1980s, they have shed labour quickly. We are therefore likely to see unemployment, even with the much-altered figures, rising rapidly as companies shed labour. I doubt whether they will ever again take on much of that labour. Employment replacement will depend almost entirely on the smaller business sector. That has important implications for Government policy, which they must begin to recognise.

The most striking feature of this recession is that it need never have happened, at least on this scale. There is always a business cycle, with its tendency to go down as well as up, but I do not believe that we should be facing a recession of the scale now expected but for the Government's failure to control inflation.

Why is there a recession? The immediate cause is high interest rates. The reason for high interest rates is the Government's failure to conquer inflation. They greatly worsened inflation by combining tax cuts with hasty credit liberalisation and general economic mismanagement. The Government greatly fuelled the inflationary fires and we are paying the price. They still have no long-term policy to drive inflation out of the system. Ministers even seem to be pleased at the prospect that both the headline and the underlying rate of inflation will be in the 5·5 to 6·5 per cent. range some time next year—perhaps towards the end of next year. I emphasise that the underlying rate of inflation will be at about that level. The two rates are likely more or less to converge.

With rates of inflation at that level, I do not know how Ministers can speak with pleasure and satisfaction about them. If the Conservative party were in opposition, it would be deeply and bitterly critical of such levels of inflation.

The policies that the Labour party advocates in its motion are, in many respects, useful policies that will assist industry in seeking to get out of the recession. However, they all have an inflationary downside. It is not safe to put such policies into operation unless one also has long-term measures to tackle inflation. We need a firm anti-inflationary framework.

I agree that it is desirable to stimulate investment in research and to increase spending on education and training. Indeed, I believe that spending on education and training cannot wait until we have the economic improvements to pay for it. That expenditure is the seedcorn which is necessary if we are to secure economic improvement. Therefore, if necessary, taxation might have to be increased so that we can make that education expenditure. The Labour party has tried to dodge that by saying that the majority of taxpayers will not face any increase at all and that only high-rate taxpayers and people on high incomes will face an increase in income tax.

I am not sure that Labour would be able to deliver the increases in education and training expenditure that may prove necessary without tax increases. I hope that it will be possible to do so, but there is no certainty of that.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman speak on these matters. How quickly would he expect the effects of increased educational expenditure to come through in increased growth?

Mr. Beith: They come through quite slowly. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) pointed out earlier that the university expansion in the 1960s is only now beginning to work through our system. That strengthens the argument for increasing education expenditure early and for not saying that that is one of the many desirable things that will be done once we have sufficient economic growth to pay for it. Many improvements in social welfare and public service provision will probably have to wait for the economic improvements that will pay for them.

My contention is that we must move ahead with the education and training improvements and with some of the transport improvements, including those relating to the channel tunnel link, if we are to bring about the economic growth we seek. As I have said, some of those policies have an inflationary downside, which is why we insist that they must be backed by an effective long-term anti-inflationary policy. We have set out our view in our amendment.

The Prime Minister has claimed that he will make the battle against inflation his top priority. One of this first utterances on becoming Prime Minister was:

"First and foremost, I loathe inflation".

That phrase is similar to those that were used by his predecessor. The right hon. Member for Finchley was just as strong in her belief that inflation was evil and should be driven out of the system, but she failed miserably to conquer it. She went out of office with headline inflation at over 10 per cent. and with a high rate of underlying inflation. The Prime Minister will fail if he continues his opposition to the anti-inflationary policies that our competitors have used so successfully.

We argue that, in order to have an anti-inflationary framework, we should seek membership of the narrow band of the exchange rate mechanism so that there can be no doubt about our intentions towards our currency. Today, by saying that we would not join the narrow band, the Chancellor sought to state that we are quite secure in our currency and that there is no danger of any revaluation. However, it takes more than a statement at the Dispatch Box to achieve that. The clear placing of the currency within the narrow band is a much more convincing statement about its future than anything that is said at the Dispatch Box, which can subsequently be overtaken by events.

We also argue that progress towards a single currency is an important component of an anti-inflationary policy, as is central bank autonomy in respect of monetary policy, and the prudent use of fiscal policy, including levels of taxation, in order to regulate demand. Taxation increases may well become necessary at some point, not for public expenditure reasons, but to regulate demand. The Chancellor's failure to recognise the importance of tax policy in demand management is a mistake that he should not make, having observed what happened during the tenure of his right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), when tax reductions had a considerable effect on demand. They created expectations that people were free to borrow substantial amounts of money, and demand was greatly increased.

I believe that the new Prime Minister intends to change the tone and style of the Government's approach on European matters. There is a reasonable prospect that he will have a successful visit to the Rome conference. It seems possible that the Prime Minister could achieve a new fudge—a new statement based on the hard ecu plan, which might be accepted as a basis for further discussion by our partners in the Community, and one which suggested that the plan could lead to a single currency. Our partners would then accept that our Prime Minister was acting in good faith in subscribing to a plan with that possible destination. There is a prospect of the right hon. Gentleman returning from Rome with an agreement between ourselves and our European partners that will make the conference look like a success.

However, that is only the beginning. The Prime Minister must then face the Bruges group and his right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who appears to be in sympathy with the Bruges group. He will also have to face attacks from Conservative Members who do not want to have anything to do with a single currency or central bank independence. They want none of it. The issue of Europe will come back to haunt the Conservative party again and again.

As I have said, I expect the Prime Minister to make some progress at the Rome conference, but why does he not take the opportunity to build in the anti-inflationary mechanisms that have been so successful in our partners' countries, which have a better inflation record than our own, and with whom we compete in trading terms?

Mr. Tim Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the principal merit of the hard ecu proposal is that it is strongly anti-inflationary?

Mr. Beith: Yes, but its principal demerit is that it is regarded by many people in most other countries as a confused and unlikely way to arrive at a single currency, which is their objective. They will want to see a plan that provides a clearer route to a single currency. The hard ecu plan has many other complications. It is not yet clear to me at what stage the hard ecu will be legal tender and when my

[Mr. Beith]

constituents can demand to be paid in it instead of in depreciating sterling pounds. That crucial issue needs to be resolved.

However, because our partners in Europe are so keen to secure our participation, there is some prospect that a new fudged scheme will emerge from the Rome conference. What interests me, however, is whether we shall get the real advantages of a single currency and of an anti-inflationary mechanism within a reasonable period. I do not believe that the Prime Minister is in any position to do that. Many of those who helped to make him the leader of the Conservative party are determined that he will not do any of those things. I believe that that determination will become clearer and that the back-seat driver and others will make it clearer in the coming weeks. This is not an issue of a simple difference of view; it is an issue on which some Conservative Members obviously feel deeply. The former Prime Minister is one of them, and I do not believe that she will abandon those convictions for a moment.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Before the hon. Gentleman moves from the European part of his speech, will he explain how the phrase "central bank autonomy" in his party's amendment, which I assume means separate from Government, sits alongside the rest of the amendment, which refers to things that are clearly the responsibility of Government? How can those two things sit together?

Mr. Beith: In just the same way as they sit together now in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the central bank has autonomous responsibility to maintain price stability and its monetary responsibilities are related to that maintenance of price stability. It still rests with Chancellor Kohl to make the decisions, which he has taken, about German unification and about progress towards a single currency. Sooner, or later, the Germans —and others in the Community—will want to make clear their view that they are not prepared to be part of any single currency scheme that does not have the principal attribute of the deutschmark at the moment—that of a non-inflationary currency, protected by a central bank, the prime responsibility of which is price stability.

Our economic prospects will be a great deal better once we have sound money. Conservative Members' unwillingness to back sound money is one reason for their failure to sort out the problems of our economy. What worries me is that, by the middle of next year, the Government will want to claim, with some satisfaction, that they have achieved an underlying inflation rate of 5 or 6 per cent. —to refer to 5 per cent. is to be over-generous to the Government—and a place for Britain in the slow lane of Europe, with some possibility that we might eventually join the single currency. That is not a reasonable proposition to offer this country. The country deserves and can achieve much better than that, but it will require more radical policies than the Conservative and Labour parties are prepared to undertake.

6.39 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate because the speeches have been interesting and of high quality. Some of my colleagues, although not trained as economists, have demonstrated the truth of a saying that sometimes comforts me: there are no good economists. Anyone who is sensible and understands money becomes a banker. However, I enjoyed my hon. Friends' contributions very much.

I should like to single out three speeches, including the maiden speeches of the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), which were exceptionally good. They caught the ear of the House and we all look forward to hearing those Members again. If only, when I make my speeches, I could gather the sangfroid that they appeared to have, I should be grateful. I very much admired their speeches. The third speech which I should like to single out is that of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). It was interesting and amusing, as his speeches always are, but it could be characterised for its lack of content. It was extremely thin. I hope that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will answer some of the questions that were put to the Opposition. We want to know the Labour party's thoughts on matters such as credit controls which it has espoused in the past but upon which there has recently been deafening silence.

Economics is more of an art than a science. Some commentators speak as though it is easy to handle the economy, but it is not. It is complicated and uncertain. Our market economy has served us exceptionally well. It is easy to compare it with the centralised, socialistic economies of eastern Europe and the bureaucratic economy of the Soviet Union. Even Albania is moving away from a centralised economy. I, for one, think that China cannot stand aside from this indefinitely.

The market economy means that the Government's role is limited to ensuring that the market can operate freely and without hindrance. The Government's role is to promote free choice, to lessen controls and to ensure that any inhibitions on the market economy are diminished as much as possible. Of course, some elements of control are necessary, in exactly the same way as there is a need for a highway code and other regulations to explain and to control driving on roads. We cannot have people deciding where they want to drive on the road any more than we can have people deciding how to operate in the economy. Nevertheless, it is the job of the Government to lessen the effect of inhibitions on the economy if they can. That is why, as one of our first operations in government, Sir John Nott, the then Secretary of State for Trade, abolished exchange controls. We cannot have a market economy and total centralised control. Any commentator who thinks that the economy can be readily controlled, as if this were a centralised economy, is wrong.

It follows that the weapons of control are necessarily blunt. That is why the Government's role should be to provide a framework within which the economy can operate successfully and then exercise that most difficult of all qualities of Ministers—reticence. That is what we have done since 1979, and the benefits have come in abundance. We have had extraordinary growth, with a growth average of rather more than 3 per cent. a year between 1981 and 1989. Productivity is well up. The profitability of companies is up. Last year, business start-ups were running at about 1,700 a week——

Dr. Moonie: Closures.

Mr. Viggers: I heard the word "closures". This year, there will be a net increase in business start-ups. Some 67 per cent. of people now own their own home and prosperity has been widely shared. One reason why it has been possible for businesses to operate in such a successful environment is that the Government did not shrink from grasping the nettle of the problem of the overpowerful unions. One significant factor in the economy's success over the past 11 years has been the curtailment of union power.

What would the Labour party do at present? I, too, studied the Labour party's motion. It calls on the Government

"to lower the crippling level of interest rates".

If there were a large reduction, it would be as inevitable as night follows day that the value of the pound would fall, the cost of imported component parts for industry would increase and inflation would be fuelled.

The Labour party urges the Government

"to reverse the cuts in public investment in training and support for industry".

I support that call in respect of training but not in respect of support for industry. I submit, with deference, that if anyone in the House can claim to have some small knowledge of Government money being used to support industry, it is me, because for three years I was responsible for the economy of Northern Ireland. In 1986, I inherited an economy where the amount of money going into industry, especially to state-owned operations—Short's aircraft company and Harland and Wolff—was so great that latterly it seemed that we were subsidising those companies to the tune of about £15,000 per man per year simply so that they could stay in business. The more I saw of the business of those two companies, the more I realised that it was crucial that they should move from the public to the private sector, allowing normal private sector decisions to operate.

Those transitions to the private sector have worked well. The quality of the management and men belied the lack of success of those companies. Of course there were bright, capable, hard-working people in the companies, but Government decision making and Government funding led to bad decisions all along the line and to senior management coming to my Department at the end of each year to explain how much extra money was needed to keep their companies in business.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is not the hon. Gentleman's line a little absolutist? I could quote a number of examples from my 25 years in business and industry showing where Government and public money was used effectively. The Scottish Development Agency has had terrific success in stimulating manufacturing industry, particularly high technology.

Mr. Viggers: Of course I recognise that public money can be extremely useful in promoting industry, but it is available for support in industry in appropriate cases and in appropriate ways, particularly training—one aspect which I singled out and exempted from my criticism of the Labour party's motion.

Labour's proposal is to put more money into support for industry and

"to promote the modernisation of British industry through the application of new technologies".

Surely that is what industry should be doing and exactly what the Government should not be doing. In my experience, the Government are not well suited to making decisions about the modernisation of industry; I prefer to leave that to industry.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the two cannot operate together. Surely if this is done carefully and sensibly and the private and public sectors work together in certain parts of the economy, that can bring terrific results. By taking an absolutist view, the hon. Gentleman is brushing away one important area where the economy could be stimulated.

Mr. Viggers: Of course, everything is not exactly black or white—there are shades of grey. Nevertheless, I would maintain the main thrust of my comments: when the Government approach industry and say, "We want to help you", that is when industry should worry. Industry should be the motor of development. I have been consistently disturbed to see the extent to which industry is quite good at reshaping itself to take advantage of Government grants and loans, ending up in a distortion of the judgments that should be made by industrial leaders. They should be taking decisions to make profits for their companies so that they can employ more people, produce more profits and export more. They should not always be looking over their shoulders to see how much Government grant they can get. I believe from my hands-on experience that Government funding can distort the fount of industry. That is why I oppose the Labour party's motion.

Apart from the motion, we do not know what the Labour party has in mind. We do not know whether it supports credit controls. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who I believe is a Labour Front-Bench spokesman on Treasury matters, says that they "can be circumvented". The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who is a former Labour Treasury Minister, described credit controls as rubbish. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East says that imposing credit controls will not be easy to achieve without exchange controls. I agree with that. Credit controls would be difficult to impose. They work only at the margins.

Most people who wish to control credit home in on credit cards. According to the Central Statistical Office figures, credit card lending in 1989 was £7 billion whereas the amount of lending on property and property-related purchases was £255 billion. Credit cards are at the margins. Property and property-related financing is at the root of our present overheating.

Economists talk about monetary aggregates. I prefer to think in terms of the property market and property borrowing getting out of hand. Clearly the right instrument to take to such frothy expansion in the property market is the weapon of high interest rates. There are signs that that weapon is working.

Dr. Moonie: Does the hon. Gentleman believe in correcting the market distortion caused by tax relief on interest payments for house purchase?

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) commented on that, and I do not wholly demur from what he said. The amount of mortgage lending which is tax relieved is comparatively small and would not have much effect on the property market. We need a weapon which works on prices and the right weapon is interest rates.

[Mr. Viggers]

Initially there was a shock as vendors ceased to put their properties on the market. Gradually prices came down and now we have a much sounder base. I know that business and industry are in great pain, but the fundamental underpinning of the market, which involves property values, is on a much sounder basis. Property prices are edging gradually upwards and the position is now sound. I expect the recession to bottom out in 1991 and growth to resume thereafter.

I want to make sure that, as growth returns, more people can share in it by being shareholders. Privatisation has improved the position. I proudly declare an interest as the owner of 100 shares in London Electricity and 100 in Southern Electricity. Despite the criticisms, the price was right. It should be gauged on the full price of 240p per share. Anyone with any knowledge of funding and new issues knows that the line between success and massive oversubscription and failure is a narrow one. The issue has been a considerable success, which is nothing less than I would have expected from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy whose skill in this and other matters is exceptional.

We have attracted 5·7 million new shareholders through electricity privatisation, 4·5 million through gas privatisation, 5 million through the flotation of the Trustee Savings bank and 2·3 million through the privatisation of British Telecom. We now have 11 million shareholders. However, shareholdings run wide, but not deep. Of those 11 million shareholders, 6·5 million have shares in only one company and only a third of a million people have anything that could be described as a share portfolio. The result is that, whereas in 1975 40 per cent. of shares by value on the stock exchange were held by private shareholders, now only 20 per cent. are. That has an impact on the Treasury's approach to savings.

Our savings ratio of gross domestic product is only 3 per cent. compared with 8 per cent. in France, Germany and the United States and 15 per cent. in Japan. I hope that the Treasury will do something to improve our savings ratio by improving the number of private shareholdings.

I understand that there is a working party on savings within the Treasury. I hope that it will look at the cost of share transactions and the taxation of share profits. I should like to signal the idea that shares which have been held for more than one year should perhaps be exempt from capital gains tax. The amount yielded in that way is not much. I urge greater simplicity. Even personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts have their complications. I urge more use of the investment trust and unit trust vehicles and ask the Treasury to exempt them so that they, too, can be used within the PEP and TESSA structures. That is important because if more people can be encouraged to be shareholders, more would have a stake in the country. They would parallel the 67 per cent. who now own their own house. Stock exchange shares are a good investment. A £1,000 investment in 1980 would have increased to £4,000 by 1990, whereas the same sum invested in a building society would have increased to £2,200. I hope that the Treasury will encourage more people to become shareholders so that they can share in the prosperity which I am certain lies ahead with the Conservative Government.

6.55 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on their eloquent speeches. I know how difficult it must have been for my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North, who has replaced her husband who had many friends here. The quality of their speeches will undoubtedly continue in the new year, and I thank them for that.

Today we have heard the Conservative Government's jumble-sale economics. It is sad for me and my constituents that the Government believe that they are on the right road. They are on the road to ruin, and the nation knows it. They do not understand economics. Now that they have picked the new Errol Flynn of the Conservative party, the crown prince brings a new dawn. He does not understand. Before we are finished with him, he may not be too pleased that he accepted the job of Prime Minister; he will probably be happy to have his application for a job as a bus driver accepted.

The Treasury record of this great man who has been appointed in the past two or three weeks is appalling. Since April, during his term there, 100,000 people have lost their jobs and some 22,500 businesses have gone down the drain. For three years he agreed to freeze family allowance to the poorest and most vulnerable people. That from the man who says that he believes in a classless society. If he does, he must understand about classlessness. He must possibly have read the dialectics of Karl Marx and Hegel. They might give him a wee bit more education on socialism and classlessness. He must also have read "Wages, Price and Profit". Yet it is obvious that neither he nor his party is aware of the seriousness of following their present course.

Some 22,000 homes have been repossessed because the Government have brought the economy to the sorry state that it is in today. Think of the thousands of people who have suffered because of the Government's mistakes. This year, 95,000 people are more than six months in arrears with their mortgage payments. The rest have had their houses repossessed. That is the kind of caring compassionate Government we have. It would be better for this country if we got rid of them. They have brought, and will continue to bring, nothing but disaster.

The Government say that we are in recession, while some say that we are moving on. How can we move on with a trade deficit of £16·9 billion? How can we move on when inflation, which was 5·3 per cent. when the Prime Minister was at the Treasury, has risen now to 11 per cent.? Do the Government realise that people have no jobs and no future while they are sitting in wine bars and opera houses? That is the kind of society they want. There is nothing in Pandora's box for the poor. We want to change all that. We want to rid this country of the kind of policies that the Government have produced.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said nothing about the reality of the economics. He said that manufacturing industry is booming. When the Government took over in 1979, there were 7·2 million employees in manufacturing. There are now 5·2 million. If manufacturing industry is booming, as the Government claim, what happened to the other 2 million employees? What happened to the investment? Investment in manufacturing industry has

dropped by 7·5 per cent. this year. Textile workers have been hit hardest. There were 450,000 textile workers in 1979, but 25,000 jobs have been lost.

The trade unionists know what the Government are up to. They know that you have sold off the country's assets. They know that you are getting ready to do a deal in the GATT negotiations in July to clear up the problem. If the Government break the multi-fibre arrangement, another 100,000 people in the textile industry will be forced on to the dole. You do not realise what you are doing.

You sit there and talk about——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman respects the Chair, and I am sure that he will make his remarks through it.

Mr. Wray: Thank you very much for reminding me.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman gets carried away, but he must respect the Chair and make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Wray: The Government said that there was no slump and that things are booming. The construction industry training board had to fork out £1·25 million from its reserves to provide training opportunities for young school leavers who could not get sponsors. The industry is short of 2,000 trained skilled workers. If we have to build an economy, we obviously have to train the men and women to build it.

We are on a downward slope. We have heard all kinds of promises from the Government. They promised that interest rates would come down, but they have risen from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. They have gone through the roof. The property market has slumped after people had to pay £70,000 or £80,000 for a property. That is the reality of this Conservative Government and their policies. That is what we must change.

The Government want to know what the Labour Government will do. We will take back the assets that this Government took from the working class people of this country. We will show the Government what compassion is. We will give the poor some of the coppers that the Government put in their own chalices.

My constituency has one of the worst unemployment rates in Britain. Some 18·6 per cent. of my constituents claim unemployment benefit. We have to understand what unemployment means to the four or five people in a family who are on the dole. It means poverty and sickness. Not very long ago, soup kitchens were being opened in my constituency because the social security office closed down.

People in work today should help those who have no jobs. They are only a job away from social security, and the people on social security are only a Giro away from starvation. More than 5,000 people are unemployed in my constituency. There has always been a recession in my constituency. There has been no change. We know all the ins and outs of social security.

It is bad enough to have to live and work in a constituency that is rife with poverty, but this gang brought out the Social Security Act 1989, which was intended to jackboot the working class and the unemployed. As a result of that Act, when people go to collect their dole money, they act like beggars. They have to prove that they are looking for jobs when there are no real jobs to be found. However, there are plenty of cheap jobs with low pay. Claimants have to satisfy the adjudication officer, and that has led to a drop of 40 per cent. in the number of claimants.

We should not be kidded by the Prime Minister's compassion. He has condoned the nation's poverty. He will not bring prosperity to the people of Britain; he will bring doom. They might have changed the jockey, but they have not changed the horse, and the horse is running in the same direction. It is time that we exposed the Vincent Price of politics. He will be feasting like a vulture on the weakness of working men and women. That is the kind of politics espoused by the Prime Minister and his gang of thieves.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Wray: No, I have not finished. I was simply pausing. I have sat here for five hours, and I sat in the Chamber for eight and a half hours one day last week without being called to speak. Mr. Speaker patted me on the back yesterday and told me that I would be called today. He knows that his eye has not been in my favour for some time and I hope to catch his eye again after Christmas.

A Conservative Member referred earlier to the community charge. The Government know that that is their death knell. We may be witnessing the last ever Conservative Government. Every elector in the country knows that the poll tax is unjust and unfair. Is it not sad that the Government have allowed £3 billion for the review of the community charge? Do they know what is happening in Scotland?

Mr. McAllion: No.

Mr. Wray: Well, perhaps I can give them some of the statistics. In 1989, 14·7 per cent. of the community charge in Scotland remained uncollected. In Strathclyde, one of the biggest regions in Scotland, the figure was 17·4 per cent. Scottish authorities have had to find £47 million to keep services going. In December 1990, 59·2 per cent. of the community charge bills has still to be collected. That is not the result of a massive non-payment campaign. It stems from the fact that people are finding things difficult. The Government introduced the community charge and they have broken up families throughout Britain.

The Government are not going to change their policies. Of the £623 million that presently remains to be collected in Scotland, £289 million is owed in Strathclyde and that represents 63 per cent. of the total. That is the economics as far as local authorities are concerned. We must not forget that, in the 1970s, we were paying 75 per cent. to central Government.

Conservative Members talk about democracy and accountability. There is no accountability or democracy, because, almost pound for pound, the burden has been transferred back from central Government to local authorities. The Government are finding it very difficult. They are cutting housing grants and everything else they can cut to make life hard for the poor and luxurious for themselves. That is what they believe in. Today, the Chancellor said that there is an equal right to become unequal. That was a poor statement. The former Chancellor did a better job.

The Government are now asking us for advice. They have been in government for 11 years and they are asking us to get them out of the poll tax mess. What happened in

[Mr. Wray]

1801 will happen again—the people marched in, dragged the Government out, and strung them up by the neck for implementing the poll tax. The Government will certainly need to abolish the poll tax. They know that it is unjust. The Layfield committee, which was set up to inquire into local government finances, told the Government that it would be difficult to implement the poll tax.

Hon. Members are waiting to speak. They have been sitting here for five hours, just as I had to. The Government and the Prime Minister are not kidding the poor. We will jackboot them, just as they jackboot us. It is time that the Government called a general election so that we can find out who is right and who is wrong.

7.11 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I shall certainly not try to join the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) in his vehement style and uproar against the inflation rate of 11 per cent. If I were to do so, I would have to become hysterical about the 26 per cent. inflation rate that the Labour Government inflicted on the country when I originally came to the House. I shall start my remarks with a much more pleasurable task, which is to add my thanks and appreciation to the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). All hon. Members remember their maiden speeches, and the hon. Members for Paisley, North and for Paisley, South will remember theirs with pride, in particular the hon. Member for Paisley, North, who made an excellent speech in what must have been difficult personal circumstances. They are both to be congratulated.

If we had the procedure that applies in the United States Congress, I would read into the record a speech that I made in July last year which expressed some concern about our manufacturing base and our balance of trade. I would repeat the conversation that I had with the then Chancellor in 1988, which in turn would repeat the conversations that I had with the then Chancellor back in 1987 which covered my concern about the size of our manufacturing base and its effect on our balance of trade. In 1987, I was reassured by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), in his individual style, that I had very little to worry about. As the years went by, I found that his reassurances were becoming a little more hesitant. I share the view of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) that we could be entering a stop-go cycle. That would be particularly damaging.

Undoubtedly, interest rates will come down as inflation comes down, but I want to make sure that our manufacturing base is able to take advantage of the upturn and not again start seeing foreign goods being sucked into our economy and once more back on the merry-go-round of stop-go. As a percentage of gross national product, our manufacturing investment is the lowest of the G7 countries. Is it a coincidence that the Japanese figure is 50 per cent. above the average of the other G7 members, bearing in mind Japan's balance of trade surplus and low inflation and interest rates? Manufacturing investment in this country has increased over the years, and that is to be welcomed, but it is now starting to tail off. In real terms, we have managed to reach the levels that were achieved in 1979.

On research and development, there is a somewhat similar picture. Those who are putting effort into research and development are doing quite well, especially the chemical and pharmaceutical industries. As a percentage of gross national product, our Government's research and development matches that of our major competitors. However, of the 0·7 per cent. of our gross national product, the majority is targeted at one aspect—defence activities. Again we must ask whether it is a coincidence that we have done so well in defence exports. The reason for it is that effort and expertise have been utilised.

Reductions in manufacturing investment and research and development lead me to the one point that worries me most, and that is the short-term attitude that seems to exist in many of our companies. We hear much talk about creating a level playing field. Japan and Germany have low interest rates, low inflation and low balance of trade surpluses. We would have difficulty in saying to them, "We want a level playing field. We want you to follow what we are doing." We do not have a level playing field. It is a battle field. If we can get it tilted in our favour, so much the better.

Japanese and German companies are able to take long-term investment decisions without fearing that a predator will take them over. They can accept PE ratios that just cannot be accepted in our market today. Who can recall the takeover of a Japanese company or a hostile takeover of a German company? If we examine the way in which their financial institutions invest in companies, we can see why they can offer security for the future. It is because there is close involvement. The continual pressure for higher and higher dividends to make sure that the pension funds or financial institutions keep away predators makes it exceedingly difficult for companies to adopt a long-term strategy for survival.

It was interesting that, during Back-Bench committee hearings earlier this year, two captains of industry, both duly dubbed for their services, spoke to us within a week of each other. The first agreed with the scenario that I am painting, but the second disagreed. I noted with a degree of irony that within two weeks of the meeting the second captain of industry was fighting like mad to hold back a predator who felt that, unbundled, the company in question would be more profitable.

We have a peculiar habit of treating the matter as though it were a game, whereas it should be recognised for what it is—a battle. I learnt a long time ago that a JCB could dig a trench quicker than a man with a shovel. We need manufacturing investment and research and development if we are stay ahead. Investment must take place if we are to increase the 22 or 23 per cent. GNP from our manufacturing base to 30 per cent. Again—coincidence or not—Germany and Japan manufacturing are giving greater percentages to their gross national product than ours. Is it a coincidence that the figure in Germany is about 30 per cent. and that in Japan it is 29 per cent.?

Let us see what practical things we can do. I do not want the Government to start trying to pick winners. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) spoke eloquently about money going into industries. That is just the same as pouring it down the drain. I can remember the National Enterprise Board. The Government went out to pick winners, and that cost us millions of pounds.

We should try to ring-fence manufacturing investment and research and development so that it is not squeezed

out by dividends. In Germany the financial institutions hold so much equity that companies must be persuaded to pay dividends. If they do not pay them, they must pay corporation tax in excess of 50 per cent., but if they do the corporation tax drops down to about 35 per cent. We must encourage greater investment on the part of companies in manufacturing and research and development if we are to compete with our foreign competitors.

Our foreign competitors give much more support to aid and trade provisions. When Treasury Ministers consider such provisions, they should ignore the applications before them and ask to see the details relating to additionality. Revealing studies by some of our companies have shown the number of further contracts and follow-up work that has resulted from initial orders to justify the initial support. It is important to consider such additional business.

How has Germany achieved its economic miracle? It is largely due to the establishment of a series of business organisations—in particular, the German association of chambers of industry and commerce, known as DIHT. There are about 69 chambers in western Germany and they are responsible for the firms that produce about two thirds of Germany's gross national product. They work with 53 overseas chambers and together they represent 35,000 firms that account for two thirds of the German GNP. Membership of the chambers is compulsory, but that organisation is independent and gives a clear direction to the German Government on future policy. When we realise how well Germany is going in comparison to us, we would be stupid if we did not learn something from its practices.

Germany is a successful competitor because those chambers also provide counsel on training and skills. We are starting to learn from Germany in that respect, and I congratulate the Government on their efforts in training. The Government have done a marvellous job by setting up the training and enterprise council system. I am pleased to note that all 82 of the employer-led training councils will be up and running next year and that they will receive as much as 50 per cent. of the Department of Employment's budget. That money will give those councils greater flexibility and freedom to produce a supply of trained, skilled people.

Mention has already been made about how long it takes for someone to receive training. We must get away from the clockwork mouse syndrome. When a person leaves school, he is wound up with one piece of training for life and off he goes. We must recognise that that person might have three or four careers before retiring. We must ensure that flexible training is available to enable people to adapt to new careers as circumstances change.

I hope that TECs do not lose sight of small firms that are unable to spare management to become involved in the councils' activities. We must ensure that those small firms are not swept aside in the general programme.

The Government are absolutely right to drive down inflation, for if we do not conquer that we have nothing. I am worried, however, that once that is achieved British industry will be unable to take advantage. The Government must address that problem, otherwise we might end up with a stop-go cycle that will benefit no one.

7.23 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): In common with all hon. Members who heard my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), I could not fail but to be moved by the sincerity and passion of their speeches. I hope that they retain that passion over the years. Sad to say, some of us have lost it, though not, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) who made a most passionate speech.

The Labour Benches are well attended by those of us who represent Scotland. I hope that the House will not mind if I refer to the transformation in the Scottish economy that has taken place, rather than macro-economic conditions as they affect Great Britain.

I always like to remind people that I came to the House in 1979—the year that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was elected as Prime Minister. The decline that has been suffered in Kilmarnock since then has had more to do with the former Prime Minister than with the fact that I was elected to represent that constituency. So far, my constituents have believed that, and I do not believe that anything that has been said tonight will cause them to change their minds.

In the past 10 years the Scottish economy has transformed dramatically. No one would deny that, in the past, Scotland relied far too heavily on heavy, primary manufacturing industries. The changeover from those industries, however, has been dramatic and almost unbelievable.

Today, we are down to our last deep coal mine—I do not mean just in Ayrshire and the Kilmarnock district, but in the whole of Scotland. Ayrshire used to be famous for its mines and miners, but I do not believe that there is one working miner left in that county. I would not weep over the demise of the mining industry—that would keep men from digging in the bowels of the earth—if there had been alternative industrial employment. Sadly, because of their age, the vast majority of miners are unemployable. Now that they no longer even appear as part of the unemployment statistics, they have simply disappeared.

We are down to our last two shipyards in Scotland. Scotland was once the pride of the world for shipbuilding. Recently I visited Yarrows and I was extremely impressed at the skill and modernisation that has taken place there. Without doubt it is the most modern yard of its type in Europe, but, because of a lack of orders, 600 redundancies are imminent. If some of the orders in the pipeline do not materialise within the next 12 months, upwards of 1,200 redundancies will be issued from that ultra-modern shipyard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South referred to the closure of Howdens, which was considered the creme de la creme of machine shops. It was opened with great pride and ceremony by the former Prime Minister to prove that Scotland had reasserted its competitiveness in world markets. That company has now gone. In a week it vanished off the face of the earth. We cannot help wondering what is in it for us in this new industrial era when the finest machine shop in Europe, if not the world, has closed. Its closure was not due to any lack of skill or ingenuity on the part of the work force or the local management. Unfortunately, that company was part of a multinational enterprise which does not consider the morality of its decision to dispose of a plant on site. It does

[Mr. William McKelvey]

not consider what will happen to those people who have served that industry so well. There is not another steelworks in the world that has shown as much capacity to increase productivity as Ravenscraig. Unfortunately, it is to be disposed of.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) asked whether there had ever been an example of a British industry taking over a foreign one. British Steel has taken over a German steel plant instead of investing adequately in plant in Scotland so that we could produce steel there. That can be put down to the malevolence of only one man—the chairman of British Steel, Bob Scholey, who warned the Select Committee six years ago that the Government had intervened against his wishes and that he would overturn their intervention at the first opportunity. So British Steel's decision had nothing to do with markets or profitability. It had to do with one man destroying an industry in Scotland. Scotland will not forgive him for that; neither will it forgive the Scottish Ministers who stood by wringing their hands and allowing it to happen.

Mr. Page: I do not want to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but just for the record I referred to a takeover of a Japanese company and a hostile takeover of a German one. I fully accept that British Steel took over the German company, but that was with the willing support of the Germans.

Mr. McKelvey: It may have been with the agreement of the German Government, but I doubt whether the German workers willingly agreed to it. If British Steel pays the same wages in Germany as it pays here, the Germans may not be so happy about being taken over in the end.

The economy of Scotland, which was heavily dependent on industry, has been turned over. Like many hon. Members, I can offer a catalogue of disasters in my constituency. They are well documented, but it is perhaps worth repeating that we have lost major industries. The problem began with the decline and demise of Massey Ferguson, not because we could not produce the goods but because it was part of a multinational firm that believed that it could strike a better deal with France, so 1,800 jobs were wiped out in a week. It has already been said that small areas that depend on large firms can be devastated when those firms are removed. My constituency was certainly devastated by losing 1,800 jobs in three months.

The catalogue does not end there. Shanks and Company, which manufactured domestic sinks and baths, was bought out by Blue Circle. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission cleared the deal and said that it would be great for everyone, but one year later Blue Circle closed the company with the loss of 280 workers, who were thrown on the dole heap. Many of them were over 45 and are no longer recorded on the unemployment register, although they certainly do not have jobs in the Kilmarnock area.

BMK, a world-famous name in carpet manufacture, once employed 1,600 workers. It now employs about 230. I am grateful that we managed to save that industry. Mr. Logue, the man who bought it and who is now successfully finding overseas markets, demanded that the workers pay a price in return for saving their jobs. They were all sacked and brought back on new contracts, with smaller wages and worse working conditions. The pensions and holidays that they once enjoyed were demolished. Their company was bought for a song on the backs of the workers and we should never forget that.

Despite this catalogue of industrial disasters, the extraordinary thing is that the economy in Kilmarnock picked up and was turned around. Even old-established firms such as the world famous Andrew Barclay locomotive manufacturing firm managed to turn around its economy because it invested in new machinery and training to produce the new locomotives needed for today. I was glad to hear the recent announcement that the firm —now part of Hunslett Barclay—won the Birmingham order for £82 million worth of new trains, The part of the order that will come to Kilmarnock will double the work force there in a matter of a year. All credit for that goes to Hunslett Barclay in Kilmarnock because it invested £4 million in new equipment and factory space to take on the order.

My constituency also boasts one of the safest industries in Scotland—the whisky bottling plant at Johnnie Walker, to which I am eternally grateful. The name Kilmarnock is printed on every bottle that goes out. Travelling the world I have found that no one has ever heard of Kilmarnock but every one has heard of Johnnie Walker, so I can make myself understood. The company has gone from strength to strength in an industry of which Scotland should be proud, because we have given the Chancellor countless millions of pounds in excise duties and billions of pounds in export revenues. We should all be glad that the new exclusive brands are bringing in much more money to Kilmarnock.

The depression is already starting to be felt in the south-east. I take no joy in telling Conservative Members that they have never known what unemployment might be like in their constituencies, or that their constituents have never known it. It is starting to bite now. I do not sympathise with Conservative Members, because the Conservative Government brought about the problem about which they are now complaining, but I have the greatest sympathy for workers who may find themselves without jobs in these difficult times. I do not know whether they will finish up in the same state as workers in the north, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Provan described. He said that many of our workers in Scotland have had to accept much lower wages than are paid in the south. Whereas in 1980 Scottish workers earned almost 99 per cent. of average pay in the south—this may be a reason why we have reversed the trend in the Scottish economy —male Scottish earnings are now below 93 per cent. of average United Kingdom earnings. Being prepared to accept lower wages perhaps means that we can still attract companies to invest in Scotland. It might even be argued that if we worked for nothing we would get all the investment that we needed—although British Steel would probably still not invest in Scotland.

Unemployment in Scotland is lower than it has been for some years. It reached its peak in 1987 and then started to fall. We are all glad of that, even though the figures have been doctored.

The textiles industry continues to decline, although it is extremely important to the Scottish economy. Textiles are usually produced in small firms spread among small villages and towns. Often, as in Kilmarnock and Loudoun and especially in the Irvine Valley, these firms are the only source of employment. If we cannot keep the multi-fibre arrangement going for a long time to come, we shall at a

stroke destroy the only livelihood of the people who work in these areas. Surprisingly, about 27 per cent. of workers in the Ayrshire area now depend on textiles for their employment. If we cannot extend the operation of the multi-fibre arrangement, we will wipe out not only those jobs but the whole economy of these extremely small but important areas.

Also important to the Scottish economy is the small farmer and especially the small hill farmer. I read with dismay that the Minister responsible for Scottish agriculture feels that small farmers are protesting too loudly about their possible demise. Many of them will go out of business because of the drastic reduction in their income this year. If the Government's attitude continues we shall return to lobby the Minister and he will face another demonstration such as the one that he saw recently when farmers came down to let the Government know about their precise difficulties.

The transformation of the Scottish economy has been a credit to management and workers who have accepted the kind of changes that were demanded. There have been extraordinary examples of workers and management working together to dispose of many of the old and outdated barriers that were between them and to create a partnership of success. As some hon. Members have said, many more companies now have a smaller number of production workers. It is important to listen to those people when they say that the recession is beginning to bite.

I am not an economist. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said that he was merely an accountant and not an economist. I doubt whether economics is in any way a science. I am a mere engineer, but I know that interest rates have had a dramatic effect on opportunities for small Scottish businesses. Those who have small businesses and those who hope to have them say that while the present level of interest rates remains there is no possibility of investing in new or updated plant and thus remaining or becoming uncompetitive. There must be an immediate cut in interest rates before the recession deepens.

The people of Scotland are usually tested as guinea pigs. We were the first to have the obnoxious, unwanted and unwarranted poll tax. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), has just entered the Chamber. That is excellent, because he can tell his colleagues that, whatever deal is done on the transformation of the poll tax —we hope that it will be abolished—and whatever arrangement is made to give rebates to people from whom money has been extracted, the Chancellor of the Exchequer should remember that the people of Scotland suffered this tax a year before anybody else. As a former trade union negotiator, I ask the Chancellor to ensure that when a settlement is reached the poor, hapless Scots get a year's back money.

7.43 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I listened with care and thoughtfulness to the many excellent speeches, and in particular to the maiden speeches by the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), who have since left the Chamber. I add my tribute to the many that they have already earned from hon. Members.

I listened with care to the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). He made a thoughtful contribution about the difficulties facing his constituency. We all share his anguish about the high level of unemployment in his area. We wish that the jobs that he seeks for his constituents were immediately available. Despite listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and to other Scottish Opposition Members, however, I still believe most sincerely and firmly, and with good evidence, that Government should allow business to operate freely.

The evidence of the years since the war is that Government manipulation and intervention creates distortions, postpones trouble and smudges decisions. At the risk of being as parochial as some Scottish Members, I must tell the House that British Shipbuilders in my constituency was running at a large loss until it was privatised. Now that the company is privatised as Appledore Shipbuilders and free of Government intervention, distortions and the smudging of decision making, it is operating at a profit.

It is not the task of Government to find jobs. It is the task of industry to create work and of people in those industries to make the jobs and invent the tasks that have to be carried out to fit the customer's needs. Perhaps I may tease Scottish Opposition Members even more by saying that the quality of life in Edinburgh tops the poll for the whole United Kingdom. The quality of life in Scotland as a whole, buttressed as it is by much Government intervention, is to be applauded.

The competitive position of Britain depends on businesses, which must seek the opportunities of 1992. Governments inevitably make mistakes but, fundamentally, Conservative policies are proven to be the best way forward and give the best framework for business and the economy. Eastern Europe alone confirms that socialism has lost. The command economy has gone. We have seen the end of Marxism and Leninism as theories of history and of economic muddle. We have seen an end to the division of Germany and the end of the Soviet empire in Europe and the Russian empire in the Soviet Union. We have seen the end of the homogenisation of the media.

All those successes are the successes of Europe as a whole and, in particular, of the political and economic policies of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom must not lose confidence in its own efforts and fall prey to siren voices. We must not wait for the answers to be provided by someone else, by Government intervention and distortion. Such a course would drop us back into a sorry muddle and would be a return to the lack of vigour which has been too much of this country's history since the war.

Our essential aim must be to see that the policies and structures that we adopt enable our citizens to hold their own in global competition with the United States and Japan. To do that we must play a constructive part in the European debate, certainly focusing first on United Kingdom interests, but accepting that those interests will be best served by a vital, economic and energetic Europe in which we respect one another.

The motion exemplifies the muddled views and interventionist and manipulative policies that brought us to our knees a decade or more ago under a socialist Government. I often wonder at the continuing inaccuracy of Opposition thinking across the board. Despite the courteous words of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) about hill farmers, the Labour

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

Front-Bench spokesman attacked farmers and said that they were too greedy. In that industry, incomes lag 30 per cent. behind the general development of the economy in Europe as a whole. The latest OECD report states that the same food package costs 25 per cent. less in Europe than in the United States of America, and that in the United Kingdom it costs 10 per cent. less again. Farming is a manufacturing industry, and one that is hugely successful. We have created a problem not of shortage but of surplus under Conservative and European policies.

Information technology, in which I have some expertise, is a vast success. I criticise deeply and accurately that part of the motion that calls upon the Government "to promote the modernisation of British industry through the application of new technologies".
Where have the Opposition been living in the past decade? The information technology world has had a growth rate of 20 per cent. compound in the past 19 years. It has had no recession since 1971, which was a year of plateau, and the current nosedive is created only by the delay in orders.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Why is it that Britain suffers a £1·5 billion deficit in overseas trade in information technology equipment?

Miss Nicholson: I shall come on to that point in a moment, as I develop my thinking on information technology.

The Government, as an employer, leads the way in the IT world. We are negating this part of the motion, because we are computerising rapidly. Almost every Government Department one cares to name, from the health service onwards, is developing the use of modern technological equipment.

I said earlier that the delay in orders is responsible for the downturn in information technology. For example, military overspend has meant that the new budget has been delayed until March of next year, and that is a large chunk of the information technology budget in both software and hardware. There is lagging in the City and a gradual lessening of business confidence, a trend that we need to turn round. The publication this week of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology report demonstrates the causal link between computerisation of business and the rise in profit.

Therefore, I am in no doubt that, once business confidence has been restored, computerised planning and the putting in of new systems in the wake of the findings of that splendid report, which contains much new thinking, will mark the beginning of an upward surge in the computer industry.

However, the very speed of growth in the information technology industry has meant some bad management of change and some implementation of bad systems. Here, I move on to training standards and the growing need for the heightening of them. Certification and common standards are crucial to the next stage of growth. That is an important international sector as well. I see the Government's task as setting the standards to which the industry must respond. Incidentally, we have only a 10 per cent. skills shortage in the United Kingdom, and that has come from the personal computer explosion, which requires a network of skills different from the earlier cluster required. Again, that is a problem of success.

We are now starting to achieve and certificate standards of competence through industry training investment, with Government assistance. Although I have the figures here, I shall not bore the House with them. Today, I was giving out the first ever computing practitioner awards. They have been planned since 1984, which shows how slow it is to get correct, agreed standards and certification. All the awards went to graduates, although they need not have done, and were given in conjunction with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. This is in line with the Government's wish to have an employer-led national framework for all vocational training, which will encourage the orderly recruitment, training and certification of the United Kingdom work force. Last month saw the publication of a feasibility study into an industry training organisation for information technology, which I believe will lead the way.

The Labour party thinks that the answer to education is to intervene and restrict freedom of choice and, failing other ideas, to throw money at difficult problems. Its solutions often make things worse, as happened in the 1970s. The figures show that the Government have a long-term commitment to education and training, whereas the Labour party has too often thought of education as social engineering, and failed to put the education of each child or young person at the centre of its policies.

The Government are halting the decline of educational standards brought about by Labour policies—policies that militated against competition and choice. I see Labour Members shaking their heads, but I have only to point out that the Labour party has adopted as its policy disestablishment of the training education councils that we have set up and that are industry-led. The information technology training councils are even more important in this sector. That is nothing more than a destructive move, and one based on ideas that have in the past led to the formation of a highly regulated, low-aspiring comprehensive environment.

The Opposition cannot get away with implying that the Government lack commitment to education and training. More money can always be used, but it has to be spent wisely and effectively. The Government are strenuously tackling the fundamental issues, which are standards in both expectations and performance. Here, I urge the Government to encourage and use even more effort to ensure competition and choice. I stress competition, because I do not believe that ownership is the key to a free market. That is why I am not concerned that Japan is to buy a large share of ICL. One of our great weaknesses, and one of the reasons why we have not been competing effectively internationally in information technology, is that we need the sharpening of competition. Competition, not ownership, lies behind the concept of the free market. I should like the Government to use even more effort to ensure competition and choice in education—by, for example, the opting out of schools.

I reject the motion and warmly support the Government's amendment, because I strenuously believe that the free market philosophy, properly applied, is the only way forward for the United Kingdom. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose the motion and to support the Government's amendment.

7.57 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). Their speeches were not only intelligent and effective but showed the passion and independence that make them worthy successors to those who served in their constituencies before them. If I have any wish for them, it is that in the years ahead the qualities that they have brought to the House will be used to change the House rather than that the dead hand of the House changes those qualities. That happens to far too many hon. Members. They become transformed and accept that reality is what happens inside the Chamber rather than outside in the world of our constituents, who do not have the opportunity to come here to speak for themselves.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said that the quality of life in Scotland, and particularly in Edinburgh, was high and that this could be attributed to the Government's policies. She would have a hard time convincing the 10,000 homeless youngsters in Scotland or the 300,000 unemployed in Scotland that the quality of life is high there. She would have an even harder time convincing the 1 million-plus of Scots who live in poverty and on benefits and in damp and decaying housing that the quality of life in Scotland is high. I could take the hon. Lady to parts of Dundee and to parts of other cities in Scotland where the quality of life borders on that of people in the third world.

Direct responsibility for those conditions lies not with those who live in our cities but with the Government, whose policies over the past 11 years have deepened the economic recession and exacerbated poverty not only in Scotland but in the north of England, in Wales and in the heart of London itself. The Government have created two societies—a rich society and a poor society. The only sector of society for which they have shown any concern is the sector that has done well in the past 11 years. They have turned their heads away from the poverty that blights far too many millions of our people.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Just for the record, I took those figures from a national survey; they are not politically inspired. I would also point out that the quality of life in the north-east has been transformed under this Government.

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Lady has been out of the Chamber for the past few minutes. She has missed most of the points that I have made and I, therefore, propose to continue with my speech.

As the debate has shown, the deepening economic recession is not a figment of the Opposition's fevered imagination. It is now accepted as reality by many Conservative Members. The Chancellor himself used the memorable phrase to describe the recession, referring to it as "a marked slowdown". I am not sure that the Chancellor knows whether that slowdown is relatively shallow or relatively short or, indeed, exactly what "slowdown" means. But when a Tory Chancellor admits to a slowdown, we know that a real recession is taking place in the country at large.

Last month, when the Secretary of State for Scotland announced a small drop in unemployment in Scotland, he warned that rising unemployment in Scotland could not be ruled out as the economy slowed in the years ahead. He knew very well that the recession that had already begun south of the border would soon spread north of it. Cabinet Ministers know much more about recessions than Labour Members. For a start, they have been responsible for far more of them than we have. They also have access to information to which we are not privy.

I have no doubt that, when the Secretary of State for Scotland spoke last month about rising unemployment, he already had access to information revealed today concerning British Rail's rail freight distribution division's decision to close down the speedlink service in Scotland from July next year. That will be a body blow to jobs and to the environment in Scotland. It is yet another crippling setback to Scotland's attempts to create transport links with Europe on the eve of the completion of the single integrated market. Given those circumstances, it is disgraceful that we should have had to wait four and a half hours for Scottish Office Ministers to appear. I can well understand why they have not been prepared to listen to the debate. No doubt they cannot even begin to defend the policies that have allowed such a catastrophic decision to be made. No doubt they will be here for a few brief minutes and will disappear again having made no contribution to the debate.

Just as disgraceful is the fact that the new Secretary of State for Transport, who had five years' experience as Secretary of State for Scotland—who knows our problems and understands the significance of the withdrawal of the speedlink service from Scotland—has not considered it worth his while to attend the debate or to justify his lack of activity and intervention which have allowed British Rail to go ahead and make the decision.

Let me concentrate on my area—Dundee and the north-east of Scotland. In recent years, we have had to face a catalogue of damaging decisions about our rail infrastructure. The first was the decision to close down the freightliner depots at Aberdeen and Dundee. Then came the decision not to electrify the east coast line north of Edinburgh, followed by the decision that our rail services should be fobbed off with second-best sprinters while investment in high-speed electrification elsewhere in the United Kingdom continued. We are now expected to bite the bullet and accept the closure of the speedlink services.

Given that Scotland is on the periphery of Europe and that the north-east of Scotland is on the periphery of Scotland, the decision will be a hammer blow to our economic prospects. Business and commerce in my area will now effectively be cut off from the European network and from enjoying access to European markets on the same basis as their competitors. We have been asked to settle for second best. We have had to settle for a promise that there will be an international freight depot somewhere deep in the heart of central Scotland—probably at Motherwell but in any case somewhere that is unconnected to the north-east of Scotland by rail freight links.

We must contrast that depressing scenario with the approaches of other European Governments and countries. France, for example, has recently decided to invest a further £100 million in its high-speed rail network, on top of the thousands of millions of pounds that it has already invested. France gets thousands of millions of pounds' worth of additional investment while the north-east of Scotland faces yet more cuts in investment in its railway infrastructure. How are we supposed to compete in the integrated market? How are we supposed to fight our way out of the coming recession on the basis

[Mr. McAllion]

of less investment and of infrastructure projects inferior to those elsewhere in Europe? The excuse trotted out for the closure by British Rail's rail freight distribution division is that half the volume and two thirds of the value of the freight traffic travelling on the speedlink service will now be transferred to other trains and services. That kind of argument may wash in the midlands where there are other services; it will not wash in the more remote parts of Scotland where there are no other services to which to transfer freight traffic.

The freight traffic in Scotland will have to be transferred to our roads, with serious implications for economic efficiency and growth in Scotland—especially for what Ministers like to refer to as "green growth". It has been calculated that the closure of the speedlink services will cause an additional 300,000 additional lorry movements on Scotland's roads every year. The lorries will be carrying chemicals, timber, fertilisers and other agricultural products. All of them will be spouting carbon emissions and they will make roads such as the A77 and the A9 even more dangerous than they are now. Will Scottish Office Ministers take this opportunity to tell us whether the possibility of an increased death toll on our roads ever figures in their calculations of economic efficiency and in their efforts to secure economic growth in Scotland? That is one of the realities that they will have to face. More people will die, there will be more pollution and Scotland will be less efficient as a result of the decision that the Government have allowed to go ahead.

The speedlink decision is even more depressing when one remembers that only last week the Secretary of State for Scotland came to the Dispatch Box and announced a £9 million cut in funding for Scotland's roads. It is an old story but it is worth remembering that, on his first day as Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) received more money than he was given to spend on Scottish roads in five years as Secretary of State for Scotland. He received £1 billion to create a 10-lane super highway to replace the M25. He never had anything like that amount to spend on Scotland's roads. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and others will support me in my argument because they have campaigned for a long time for investment in the A77 and other roads in Scotland. The Government have persistently denied us that investment, yet here they are ready to spend much more money in the south because that is where they think most of the votes are.

The danger to Scotland's rail network goes even deeper than that. A succession of Ministers in both the old and the new Administration have washed their hands of British Steel's decision to push ahead with the closure of the Scottish steel industry. That will push 20,000 people into unemployment. A minimum of £200 million will be sucked out of the Scottish economy every year. Half the freight traffic and revenue generated by Ravenscraig and the steel industry will also be lost. As we know from today's speedlink decision, where business is lost, where profits disappear and where prospects for privatisation diminish on that scale, the service or industry concerned will quickly be lost as well. Scotland faces the prospect not only of the crushing loss of its steel industry but of the closure soon afterwards of its whole freight rail network which will not be economically viable after the closure of the Scottish steel industry.

How can we rise to the challenge of the single market when we shall be disadvantaged not only compared with other European countries—all of which invest heavily in their transport infrastructure—but compared with other parts of the United Kingdom where freight services will survive, where electrification and investment will continue and where there will be a direct rail link with the rest of Europe? Scotland will have no such link, so how can it be expected to compete in the face of such a calamity?

As has already been said, this Government are one of the most profligate in recent history. They have received £80 billion in North sea oil revenues and many billions more from the proceeds of privatisation, but they have wasted almost all of that in private tax cuts in lining the pockets of the already rich. The Chancellor used one of his memorable phrases to describe the process—he called it the equal right to be unequal. That is exactly what the Government have been relentlessly pursuing. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may shake their heads; I also shook my head when I heard the Chancellor use that phrase, but that is what he said. To put it in simpler terms, it means the right of the rich to become richer and the right of the poor to be made poorer. That is what the Government have been about since they took office.

During the 1980s, the rich have had the party; in the 1990s, the poor will have to pick up the tab for that. The infrastructure has been neglected, the welfare state has been starved of investment and the American experience under Reagan—public squalor and private affluence at one and the same time—is being repeated in this country. That record is not good enough and the Government's time is up. Indeed, it was up a long time ago, and it was only because circumstances and luck combined that they were not defeated in 1983 and 1987.

It is time for a new era in British politics. It is time for decision making to be taken away from the House, because the House is largely unaccountable to most of the United Kingdom. In current circumstances, it is accountable only to the south-east and to nowhere else in this so-called United Kingdom.

It is time for a new political and constitutional settlement that will give Scotland a home-rule Parliament which can take charge of Scottish domestic affairs, including large parts of the Scottish economy. It is also time for the Welsh people to have the right to decide for themselves how they want their local economy to be run. It is time for the regions of England to be given powerful regional assemblies, so that they can regenerate the economies on which their people depend. For that to happen, there needs to be a Labour Government, and for that to happen, there needs to be a general election.

The Prime Minister and the present Cabinet were never elected to their offices and they have no right to hold office simply because of an internal Conservative party coup. That is no basis on which to rule a democratic society. They are living on borrowed time and sooner or later they will have to face the people of this country, who will then have a say in who should be placed in authority over them. I hope that it is sooner rather than later, because the sooner the Government go to the country, the sooner they will be defeated, the sooner there will be a Labour Government, and the sooner we can begin the fight back out of recession.

8.13 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in paying tribute to the two new Members of Parliament who made their maiden speeches tonight, the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). The hon. Lady's speech had an enviable fluency and content, and I have no doubt that she will make a major contribution to the House in coming years.

Every hon. Member who has spoken, with the exception of the two Front-Bench spokesmen, has distanced himself from the label "economist". I have no intention of seeking to compete with the professional financiers and those with degrees in economics. I speak as one of the few hon. Members—sadly, all too few—who are genuine manufacturers. One or two Scottish Labour Members have made an issue of manufacturing. My industry was textiles. Of course, that industry covers a multitude of sins. I survived in it for 30 years before coming to this House, 20 of them as production director and the last five as managing director of a company that I joined as a young man. Some may dispute this, but I venture to suggest that anyone who has survived for that long in textiles—the mass production end to boot—knows what recession, hard times and tough trading conditions are all about. No one in this House can give me a lesson on that.

I do not dispute that times are tough; it would be foolish to paint a different picture. However, I would not call it a recession in the sense that I understand the word. Technically, Britain may well have met the criteria that qualify it for that sad label, but I have seen much worse and with less good cause. It has righted itself before and it will do so again, provided that those with a vested interest and a compulsive attraction to failure are not allowed to talk the country into a problem that I believe is short term, that is viewed by much of industry as short term, and that, with a little thought and care, will be proved to be short term.

I accept that the current retail figures, which show a 1 per cent. drop probably—perhaps certainly—mean minus 20 per cent. for some industries and plus 19 per cent. for others. Of course, for industries on the wrong end at minus 20 per cent., it is painful and it probably means a recession, but only in that industry. Aggregate figures always cover a multitude of gains and losses. I accept that there is a problem for the domestic construction industry and related industries such as furnishings and fittings, but the figures do not show an overall recession. It will get worse, or fail quickly to right itself, only if the doom and gloom voices on the Opposition Benches are allowed to peddle their miserable wares.

I cannot deny that unemployment is rising, nor that there is an increase in company failures. However, those are more than offset by the number of start-up businesses, even in these difficult times. I am less than impressed by the claims of a lack of investment—a line that the Labour party has peddled for the eight years that I have been in this place. It has not been true at any period during those years, and it probably is not true now. Provided that a company is well managed and is not foolishly or wantonly overstretched, I know of no real investment decisions that have been scrapped simply because interest rates are two or three points higher than they were when that investment was initiated and evaluated. If the viability of an investment was that tight, it was probably a bad or the wrong investment. If it was viable only with a Government grant, other than in very special circumstances we are entitled to question why the investment was made. I accept that investment, especially in a small company, may be delayed by the cash position of a company or by its ability to fund the necessary borrowing.

The ability to fund borrowing is the one issue that I want to address. Just as my experience gave me a feel for the limit to which any company should go without putting its existence at risk, so too must Britain and the Government have the will, skill and confidence to do what can safely be done—no more and no less—even if at the time it is less than popular.

Like most hon. Members, I regularly visit industrial companies in my area of Nottingham. There is no doubt that the small companies are watching the pennies, and they are right to do so. The small regular plant replacement is being delayed—not cancelled—just as a sensible precaution to ensure that cash and interest are within a small company's ability.

But the bigger companies—certainly the ones that I have visited—have confidence. They are using the present tightness to strike good deals on major investment, and they will be there to take full advantage of the upturn when it comes. That confidence is well illustrated by the upbeat face of Nottingham and the east midland region, which has been the pattern during the past five or six years.

But our industrialists would not dream of following the airy-fairy approach of the Opposition, who in the latter part of their motion talk of Government spending untold billions on tired old socialist schemes, presumably to put our future in hock once again with borrowed money.

The Opposition, according to the motion, deplore Government policy. Let us look at one particular aspect. When the Government took over the shambles left by the socialist planners, the largest item of Government expenditure was not on health, education or defence, but interest—just interest on old debt. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said, it was then around 15 per cent. of the budget that the Government took over in 1979. Before the Chancellor could spend 1p on real public services, that debt interest had first to be paid. Then the old nationalised industries wanted their subsidies before any of the desired items on the list today even got a look in. That figure is now down to 5 per cent. —a massive reduction in the slice of cake that now goes on debt interest, a position which is envied in many countries.

The Opposition will no doubt argue that we could and should run a higher debt ratio. I disagree. I made two trips abroad during the summer recess. I was with an all-party group who visited America.

Mr. Oppenheim: Who paid?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The Americans paid for the air tickets. We were part of the Anglo-American all-party group.

We were there at the height of the political row over the United States federal budget. I recounted to my host the financial position that I have just outlined. His reaction was one of disbelief. I was asked what I thought the burden on the federal budget was, even without the current argument. To cut a long story short——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Thank God for that.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Member for the Falklands and Jersey has only just come in and it would be helpful if he either left or joined in sensibly—preferably left.

To cut a long story short, 35 per cent. of the American federal budget goes on funding old debt. It was my turn to express disbelief. The question of what would happen if nobody wanted to fund that debt went unanswered.

I know that the American economy is a world apart from our own, but the concept of that level of debt confirmed my view that short-term pain was worth it if Britain avoided that slippery road back into debt—the kind of debt that we inherited in 1979.

Shortly after, I joined another group visiting Australia. This time it was the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, so the Australians were paying. In the state of Victoria the local joke was, "What's the capital of Victoria? No, not Melbourne; one dollar." That resource-rich state is now running a debt that takes 22 per cent. of the state's budget; it is socialist controlled. If Opposition Members think that 22 per cent. of anyone's budget going just on interest is funny, heaven help Britain if they were ever on the Government Benches.

When we moved on to Canberra and asked about federal debt, we were told that that had risen to 18 per cent. That, too, is the result of a Labour Government and socialist thinking.

I am not an economist—

Mr. Foulkes: That is obvious.

Mr. Brandon Bravo: —but I can recognise financial incontinence when I see it, even verbal incontinence, so ably demonstrated by the hon. Member for Carrick and wherever.

I hope that those countries, for our sake and for their own people's sake, get their house in order and back on the rails. But it is the kind of road that I know the Government would never go along. We do not have the almost unlimited natural resources of those two countries, and that may be why they have let matters go that far. What we do have are our energies, our enterprise and our understanding of financial discipline—and understanding that may quietly be recognised by the shadow Chancellor, but not by the noisy Members behind him whom he would never be able to restrain if he ever had that responsibility.

Interest rates will fall when that is prudent, and trade will pick up as families' disposable incomes ease as mortgage payments fall in cash terms and as a portion of the family income. Better a little caution now than tears later.

8.27 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I, too, offer my congratulations to the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on their maiden speeches. Their predecessors were good parliamentarians. The previous hon. Member for Paisley, South was one of my best friends in the House or, for that matter, anywhere, and he will be much missed. Both the new hon. Members are worthy successors.

The Treasury forecast for the United Kingdom economy for the next 18 months shows a shallow recession and output growth resuming about the middle of next year. We heard that repeated today, although every time it is repeated it seems to be with somewhat less confidence. During a session of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and again today I asked the Chancellor what action he would take, if the recession were deeper and longer, as seems likely, to get us out of it. On both occasions I was not favoured with an answer, so perhaps whoever replies to the debate will have a shot at it for me.

We have heard that the reason for a recovery next mid-year or earlier will be a fall in inflation and the end of the current reduction in stock holding by industry. Industry will gain confidence early next year and rebuild its inventories, as it ought to at that stage of the cycle anyway, and as industry builds inventories, positive gross domestic product growth will resume.

The firms that are going out of business will not be rebuilding their stocks in the middle of next year, and plenty of them are going out of business. It is not at all clear why, with interest rates as they are, inventory rebuilding on a scale to take us out of a recession would take place at all. In other words, we get the rediscovery of the business cycle, and the business cycle taking care of itself. We are on automatic pilot. It is Adam Smith's hidden hand come back to take us out of a recession.

It is, however, difficult to share the Treasury's view of the depth of the recession which—as everyone now admits—we are already suffering. Real gross domestic product fell by 1 per cent. between the second and third quarters of 1990, and it is extremely likely to have fallen further between the third and fourth quarters. That is the definition of a recession: falling GDP in two successive quarters. We are told that it is the American definition. The Chancellor has described it simply as a rough time for industry, but in anyone's language that still amounts to a recession.

Non-oil output fell by 0·3 per cent. between the second and third quarters of this year. Even worse, all the most sensitive indicators of upcoming changes in the economy fell during the third quarter, and those that we have continue to fall during the fourth. That applies across the board: it applies to indicators of demand, such as the retail sales index, indicators of supply, such as the manufacturing output index and indicators relating to confidence, such as the CBI's business confidence survey.

The CBI forecast a much deeper recession than the Treasury. The CBI's figures show a decline of 1 per cent. in next year's GDP and a fall in investment of over 6 per cent., while the Treasury's show only a 2 per cent. fall in investment. Yet the CBI's figures are based on a direct survey of investment intentions in industry. There seems to be little justification for the belief in a self-reversing recession, and all the indicators suggest that this recession will be much deeper than the Treasury originally forecast, especially in the next two quarters.

There are several reasons for that. First, real disposable income is falling sharply, which has resulted in a deceleration of retail sales volume and consumer spending. Secondly, the economy can no longer rely on buoyant exports to counteract the effect of depressed domestic sales, because the United States economy is in recession—as is much of Europe, apart from Germany—and there has been virtually no growth in our exports since the early part of the year. Most significantly, however, companies are now reacting to the financial squeeze by cutting spending, and there has been a wave of redundancies across East Anglia, part of which I represent.

The new small firms in the south and east are the most vulnerable to recession, because they are so under-capitalised and have so few means of borrowing. Retail and construction firms—major employers and sources of economic development in those parts of the country—are particularly hard hit; the construction industry has virtually come to a full stop. It looks as though unemployment will rise, and by more than the Treasury's forecast. I expect it to rise by about half a million in the early part of next year.

We should bear it in mind that we are now supposed to be enjoying a "soft landing"—a fall in inflation and in our trade deficit, without a recession. Yet the forecast deficit on current account for 1991 of £11 billion—or 2 per cent. of GDP—constitutes no great fall in a recession year and suggests that the landing is likely to consist of a substantial impact with the runway. Manufacturing output, which was considered to be the key to the achievement of the "soft landing", has now been falling for five successive months.

What about the human side? Looking back on the past decade of economic management, *The Guardian* told us on 5 December:

"Most people have more income at the end of the Thatcher years. Mr. and Mrs. Average are 23 per cent. better off. The rich are even more better off. But the income of the people at the bottom—the poorest 10 per cent.—has stood still . . .

A 45-year-old trend has been reversed: their share of the national income has shrunk. And the group just above them is suffering too. Inequalities within the working population have spread to their widest point since records began in 1986."

On top of all that they have suffered in the past decade, the recession has hit the pensioners and the low paid hardest. Whatever the Government are remembered for, they will not be remembered for economic competence and their period of office is ending in a deep recession causing widespread hardship.

When we find our way out of the recession, where will our future growth come from? We now spend 3·9 per cent. of GDP on education, as against 4·5 per cent. in 1979. French, German and Japanese companies invest 2 per cent. of their turnover in training; British companies invest 0·15 per cent. While 85 per cent. of young Germans receive post-school training and education, one third of our young people do.

In a recession, a sensible Government would be expected to invest for the upturn. Recession gives us the opportunity at least to start to bring our training up to European standards. The present Government, however, continue constantly to cut the investment in human capital that is required if we are to be a successful, competitive nation. We are not investing in our human capital, and we shall pay a heavy price for that.

8.35 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): It has been said —I forget exactly by whom—that, if we had entered the exchange rate mechanism in 1985, we would not now be suffering inflation and all would be well. It is worth pointing out that neither Japan nor Switzerland has been part of any sort of fixed-currency system, yet both have managed to keep inflation very low. It is also worth reminding those who express that view that it was the very fact that we were shadowing the deutschmark in May 1988 —a policy that was, supposedly, a precursor of ERM entry —that caused us to cut interest rates at a crucial time, which cranked up the money supply precisely when what we really needed was a rise in those rates. At the time, the former Prime Minister argued strongly against interest cuts, but effectively gave way to her Chancellor, who insisted on making the cuts to shadow the deutschmark.

The real problem of inflation has nothing to do with whether we were members of the ERM—not that I am against our membership; the real problem is that, in the mid and late 1980s, our money supply took off to a degree that the Government should not have allowed. In the mid 1980s, our money supply growth was no less than three times that of France. Therein lies something of an irony: the supposedly socialist President Mitterrand turned out to be far more of a monetarist than our own Prime Minister. It was tight monetary policy in countries such as France that caused them to experience lower inflation than we are experiencing now—along with much higher unemployment, however. Opposition Members should remember that.

Let me also remind Opposition Members that their part in this sorry saga of money supply growth was not exactly a happy one. Virtually at every instance they were urging us to cut interest rates. If we had followed their advice on every occasion, inflation would be very much worse than it is.

The real problem is that, for many years, our economy has been skewed far too much towards consumption. As a result, when we inflate the economy, too much of the money goes into consumption rather than production. It is, I think, increasingly recognised that one of the ways in which we can break out of that cycle of over-consumption is to boost savings. A country with a high savings ratio will tend to have a larger pool of capital available for industry, which will allow industry to look more to the long term. Supposedly our industry's outlook is at present too short term. There are many simplistic remedies, but I believe that a higher savings ratio is one of the valid ones.

Another advantage of that is that it tends to bear down on inflation. For some 130 years, Japan's policy has been to allow its citizens substantial tax-free savings accounts. The Japanese post office is now the largest savings institution in the world. Until recently every Japanese person was allowed to have a post office savings account completely tax free, to the tune of £20,000 a year. The Japanese equivalent of the Inland Revenue was not allowed to investigate any of the accounts. Therefore, the Japanese post office ended up with more savings accounts than there were Japanese citizens. The Japanese Government recognised the value of pushing up the savings rate in the economy.

Although we seem to have grasped that lesson, we still have a long way to go. I warmly welcome the fact that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, introduced TESSAs in the last Budget. However, as with the PEPs, they are a little complicated. They ought to be regarded just as a beginning. We must allow people to save, simply and efficiently, a substantial proportion of their capital tax free.

Although the Opposition sometimes pay lip service to the need to boost savings, their record when in government was not promising. They harmed savers by having significant negative interest rates. Therefore, anyone who saved money in a building society or bank lost out, compared with the rate of inflation. The Labour Government also cranked up taxes at all levels, especially for wealthy people who sometimes are able to save a lot of money. They imposed all kinds of penal tax surcharges. In

[Mr. Phillip Oppenheim]

effect, that meant that it was far better for wealthy people to spend their money than to save it. I hope that the Opposition have learnt that lesson.

A lesson that the Opposition have not learnt is that simplistic interventionist strategies do not work. In his speech the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer trotted out today the old line that all we need is what he called an industrial strategy. That has been tried before. How can the Opposition forget the sorry medley of companies and industries in the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s that were interfered and meddled with by politicians and subsidised in such a way that the economy was hopelessly distorted. It led to the productive and efficient sectors of our economy being drained of capital. One only has to look at the mess made by politicians and bureaucrats of our car and motor cycle industries and the power generation industry, particularly nuclear power generation. Billions of pounds and huge resources in terms of skilled men and scientists were poured into those industries.

Moreover, huge sums of money were wasted in investment in the steel industry. Decisions were made not with a view to arriving at the best commercial result, but on the basis of political expediency. Labour Governments were not the only ones to blame. One of the worst decisions ever made was by the Macmillan Government. They forced a private sector steel company to split its investment in a steel plant between Wales and Scotland. The investment was therefore far less efficient than it would otherwise have been. The steelworks at Ravenscraig were sited some way from deep-water ports and a very long way from the main markets. Politically inspired interference in industry has always been, and will always be, a complete disaster.

One reason, I believe, why the Opposition stick with their interventionist strategy is because they have completely misread the Japanese experience. It is far too easy for people to make simple excuses for Japan's success. One excuse is based on an all-powerful and all-seeing Ministry of International Trade and Industry that subsidises selected industries and surreptitiously pulls the strings of Japanese industry. But for many decades Government subsidies to Japanese industries—whether they be general subsidies or specific subsidies for research and development—have been far lower than those in the United States, Europe or Britain.

Two examples that are most frequently trotted out are the Japanese semi-conductor and computer industries. The subsidies that they received were minuscule compared with the overall investment that was made in those industries. They were also minuscule compared with the huge subsidies that we poured into companies such as ICL, that the Germans poured into Siemens and that the French poured into their computer national champion, Bull. They are minuscule too compared with the huge indirect subsidies that the American Government gave to their computer companies through tied defence contracts and other forms of indirect Government subsidy.

Mr. John Garrett: Was not the way in which until recently the Japanese Government protected their domestic industry from imports interventionist?

Mr. Oppenheim: I was coming to that later, but I will answer briefly now. It has been far too easy for western industrialists to excuse their failure to penetrate the Japanese market by saying that everything is unfair because the Japanese subsidise their industries and MITI controls everything. There has also been a significant element of exaggeration when it comes to Japanese trade barriers. Many western companies have succeeded in the Japanese market during the last 20 years. If one asked business men and women such as Michael Perry of Unilever, who worked for a long time in Japan, they would say that more often than not trade barriers were given as an excuse for the failure of western business men to penetrate the Japanese market effectively. If the Japanese market is so protected, why is it that the Americans manage to sell more to Japan than they sell to Germany, France and Italy put together? We are the guilty party when it comes to trade barriers. Only a very few items in Europe or America are not now subject to some form of trade barrier.

The reasons for Japan's success have nothing to do with protectionism—which is not significantly worse than, and in recent years has been better than, the protectionism in the west—or with subsidies. All the World bank and Organisation for European Co-operation and Development reports show that Japan's subsidies to industry are significantly lower than ours. The reasons for the strength and vitality of the Japanese economy are more complex. One reason is that the Japanese economy is more geared towards production than ours. That is due in part to the high savings ratio. It facilitates investment and long-termism by industry.

Japan's education system is also rigorously geared towards the needs of industry. It produces highly literate people. Japanese schoolchildren also almost always come top when international comparisons are made of achievements in mathematics and science. It is not a narrow education. The Japanese education system produces people with wide interests. There are cultured products of that system. However, the Japanese are not ashamed or afraid to gear their education system to the needs of industry. They believe that the first responsibility of education is to enable people to earn their living.

It is fashionable for the Opposition now to say how important education is. I am glad that they have learnt that lesson. However, in areas where Labour controls the metropolitan and county councils and, therefore, the local education authorities, there is no evidence that Labour is making any effort to produce recruits for industry of the sort that industry needs.

Is is also worth remembering that until recently the Japanese spent far less per pupil than we do, yet they still produced better results. Just to pour money into education is not the answer. We must gear our education far more towards science, literacy and the other things that we need if we are to earn our way in the world.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To illustrate the point that my hon. Friend has just made, when the polytechnics were given their independence in April of this year they were no longer suffocated by the socialist control of our county council, with the result that a group of business men got together and our big polytechnic received £4 million of commercial money. The ethos that my hon. Friend has described in Japan is now possible in this country. That is possible only because we have given the polytechnics their independence; they are no longer under socialist control.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend has made his point well.

I must not venture too far into education matters, for reasons that some of my hon. Friends understand. However, we on this side of the House know that we still have a long way to go if we are to improve our education system. It is a pity that the education reforms that we introduced in 1987 were not introduced much earlier during the period when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister. If one reads books such as Corelli Barnett's "Audit of War", it is depressing to realise how long the lead time is in education. One can change the education system, but the benefits may not come through for another 10 or 20 years.

One other reason why the Japanese have been successful is that the Japanese Government have been low spenders. They have not followed the policy that we in Britain and other western countries have followed of spending money that we cannot afford. Many people recognise that, although the things on which the British Government spent money in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s may have been worthwhile in principle, the real question is whether the economy could afford it. If the economy cannot afford such expenditure, the productive side of the economy will be drained of capital, and that is what we have done. On the other hand, the Japanese have spent strictly within their means and have maintained tight control of their public spending.

Another reason why the Japanese have been successful is that they have encouraged and inculcated pro-business attitudes. Opposition Members often criticise the performance of British industry and blame it on the Government, saying that we should be more pro-manufacturing. However, almost every successful business man or woman is derided by Opposition Members who do not seem able to come to terms with the fact that people who are successful in business make money. All too often "profit" is still considered to be a dirty word by Opposition Members.

Part of the interventionist industrial strategy solution is that the state should fund more research and development. I urge hon. Members to consider that proposition more carefully. There is no point in pouring either private or public sector money into R and D if the economy is not capable of turning that R and D into saleable products. We have been through all this before. This country has spent billions of pounds subsidising R and D, and not only in the military sector. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) that R and D is skewed far too much towards the military sector of the economy. However, we have also spent R and D money on projects such as Concorde and System X, which have not been saleable products in world markets.

Until relatively recently the Japanese spent very little on research and development. They concentrated on buying licences from the west, on improving western technology, producing it efficiently and marketing it effectively. It is worth remembering that this country is still a net exporter of licences while the Japanese are still net importers of licences. Something must be wrong, and I do not think that it is R and D itself. We must accept that we must make our production efficient and get our marketing right. Then when we get back into the ranks of being a leading economy, more money can flow into R and D. If anything, we have put too many resources into R and D and we have not seen the benefits because we have not been able to exploit the products in terms of production and marketing as well as other countries.

Mr. Page: Surely the problem is the different culture in the two economies. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Governments of both Japan and the United Kingdom give about 0·7 per cent. of their gross national product to research and development. However, the figure for Japanese industry is 2·2 per cent., whereas in Britain it is only 1·5 per cent. That means that the Japanese are spending between 45 and 50 per cent. more on R and D.

Mr. Oppenheim: My point is that that is a recent development. Until recently the Japanese spent far less on R and D, but now that Japan is the leading economy it spends more on R and D—for there is less technology to buy in the world market—*[Interruption.]* It is a case not of pinching but of buying in the technology. There is no harm in companies buying in licences. If more of our companies abandoned their "not made here" attitude and were prepared to buy in licences and to concentrate on improving those products, our economy might be more successful.

The Dutch electronics company Philips is a good example because no one can accuse that company of not spending money on R and D. Its R and D is excellent, but the company is in deep trouble. By contrast, for many years, Matsushita, the Japanese consumer electronics conglomerate, has bought in thousands of licences and has concentrated on improving those products, with the result that it is the world market leader in consumer electronics.

Philips is also a good example of how an industrial strategy can fail. No consumer electronics company in history has received more in subsidies from both the Dutch Government and the European Community than has Philips. No company has been more protected against takeovers and more protected by trade barriers, but Philips is still in the most appalling mess. The fact that the company has been protected against foreign competition must have some bearing on that, which brings me to my final point relating to trade.

Everyone is aware that the GATT talks are in crisis and that it was the attempt to include agriculture that led to the crisis. Most hon. Members will agree that the attempt to include agriculture, textiles, intellectual property and services in GATT is a positive move. However, that has tended to divert attention from a dangerous development in world trade. I refer to the growth of what are sometimes called "grey area" protectionist measures. They include unofficial or semi-official import quotas, which are sometimes laughably called "voluntary restraint agreements" or "voluntary export restraints". Those measures also include provisions which appear fair on the surface, such as anti-dumping duties, but which, because of the way in which European Community and American anti-dumping legislation is drawn up, result in huge dumping margins and huge penalties being imposed on East Asian manufacturers, even when they have not been dumping.

Few people realise the extent to which this has been going on. In America and Europe in the past 20 years, literally hundreds of product areas have been covered by quotas and import duties of one sort or another, or by anti-dumping duties. Almost everything is now covered,

[Mr. Oppenheim]

from cars to steel, and from semi-conductors through to video recorders. Hardly a product is now not covered by some European Community protectionist measure.

As the case of Philips shows, not only does such protectionism not do industry very much good because it compounds inefficiency by reducing competition, but it also imposes significant burdens on consumers. The National Consumer Council recently estimated that, because of protectionist barriers to protect Philips and Thompson in Europe, British consumers pay 25 per cent. more for their video recorders than they need to do. However, it is not only the end consumer who suffers; industry itself suffers. The price of steel in Europe is 10 per cent. higher than the world price because of the trade barriers against non-EC steel. That impairs the efficiency of, among others, our car manufacturers. Semi-conductors are also heavily protected in Europe, which makes our computer industry less able to compete in world markets because it has to buy expensive European semi-conductors.

I have been deeply disappointed that in recent years our Government, who are supposedly committed to the free market, have not made a greater attempt at the European Community level to do something about those burgeoning trade barriers. If we are not careful, the world will break into three hostile trading blocs based around the United States or north America, east Asia and the European Community, and that will be dangerous.

We now have protectionism by stealth. In the 1920s and 1930s we had big bang protectionism, such as the Smoot Hawley tariffs, which led to a trade war that exacerbated the slump and the depression and significantly contributed to the increasing tensions of the 1930s. If we are not careful, we in Europe will start to go down the same slippery slope because, although we do not have big bang protectionist legislation, we now have protectionism by stealth.

The attitude of the Opposition is not encouraging. Labour Members are rightly ready to criticise huge subsidies and trade barriers in agriculture, but when it comes to textiles they want the multi-fibre arrangement to be strengthened and they completely ignore the damage that the MFA does to the developing world. According to many estimates, the cost of the MFA to the developing world far exceeds the aid given by western nations to developing countries.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me if I do not give way; I know that an Opposition Member wants to contribute to the debate.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me. I have only a minute more in which to speak, and I know that an Opposition Member wants to speak.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that, over the past decade, Europe had overtaken Britain. That is not true. Germany overtook us in the 1950s, France did so in the 1960s and Italy was rapidly gaining on us in the 1970s. In the 1980s, we have closed that gap somewhat. Manufacturing productivity grew faster in Britain than in any other country, and manufacturing output rose faster than in any other European country. It is also worth reminding the Opposition of one point. They often go on about manufacturing, and I agree that it is important, but when the Labour Government were in power, manufacturing output fell. Under this Government, it has increased by about one quarter.

All over the world, countries are following the type of policies pioneered by the Government in the 1980s. They are not nationalising industries; they are privatising. They are not regulating their economies; they are liberalising them. They are not pushing up public spending as a proportion of their overall gross national product; they are holding it steady or reducing it. They are not raising taxes; they are reducing them. The more sensible and intelligent Opposition Members are beginning to realise that. Looking at the series of sickening, dizzying U-turns in Labour policy over the past few years, even they have to admit in their heart of hearts that they have learnt some hard lessons during the past 11 years. For whatever *The Guardian* says, Thatcherism is not dead—rather it is just coming into its own.

9 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): We have had two notable speeches, by my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). Paisley plays a special part in the industrial and social life of Scotland, and it is now represented by two splendid new Members.

We have heard a memorable phrase used by the Chancellor—the right to be unequal—which will be echoed in the House for many months to come. We cannot let the talk of blips pass for ever. I am sure that the former Chancellor knew exactly what he was talking about when he said that inflation was just a blip. If a 5 per cent. rise in the retail prices index is just a blip, it means that real incomes fall by 5 per cent. Perhaps that is precisely what he was trying to do with the original VAT increase in the early 1980s and what the Government tried to do with the recent increase in interest rates. If money incomes follow the RPI up—as is happening now—it is not a blip, and the former Chancellor clearly understood that.

Undoubtedly—this is not difficult to forecast—there will be a fall in inflation because the rate jumped by 3 per cent. last April. When that figure falls off the end of the 12-month moving average as next April's figures are announced in May, inflation will miraculously fall by 3 per cent. But that will not be due to any forecasting skill by the Chancellor; we shall simply be reading the record of what has been published and known for a long time.

The overwhelming effect of the recession in Scotland has been the precipitation of British Steel's plans to close the Ravenscraig hot mill and the Clydesdale tube mill, with the loss of 2,000 jobs in prospect and the likelihood that, within a few years, we shall lose all steel production in Scotland. The arguments that we have pursued in Scotland on the future of steel making have been consistently based on economic grounds. That is what I shall do tonight, but in a wider context.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) brought out the old canard that Ravenscraig is not on a deep-water port. In fact, it is closer to a deeper water port

than are Scunthorpe and Llanwern. He said that it was further from its markets than other steelworks. In fact, it is as near its principal market of Shotton as is either Port Talbot or Llanwern. The hon. Gentleman's point is a total irrelevancy. He repeats simple slogans, the easy jargon of journalists who have never been north of Potters Bar. It is surprising to hear that from the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley was nearer the mark when he started talking about research and development, but, again, his facts were wrong. He said that Japanese civil and industrial research and development was far lower than that of the United Kingdom years ago.

Mr. Oppenheim: I did not say years ago. I said, "until recently".

Dr. Bray: All right, until recently. In 1964 civil research and development in Japan was 1·3 per cent. of GDP compared with 1·5 per cent. in the United Kingdom—just slightly lower. By 1979 the Japanese figure had shot ahead. In other words, 11 years ago, Japanese research was 2·3 per cent. of GDP compared with our 1·7 per cent. Today Japanese civil research and development is 2·8 per cent. and rising whereas in the United Kingdom it is 1·8 per cent.

Mr. Page: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Bray: I am sorry, but I am pressed for time.

British Steel expenditure on research and development is £2 per tonne of steel produced. In a recent steel strategy document the European Community said that £3·5 per tonne was a reasonable EC target. The Japanese figure is £9 per tonne of steel. The hon. Gentleman will have read in the *Financial Times* yesterday an announcement that Kobe Steel is locating a new research and development laboratory. Where? In the United Kingdom. It is to study not steel research, but polymers and thin film diamond material to replace the next-but-one generation of semi-conductors. British Steel has abandoned all its basic research and does no research outside steel. What are the long-term prospects of British Steel surviving compared with those of Kobe Steel?

I want to address the main issue of tonight's debate, the recession. I join hon. Members who have looked forward and shall address three questions. First, what are the risks? Secondly, what can the public do? Thirdly, what can the Government do?

The underlying inflation problem is that there is no consensus on a sustainable income distribution, unlike that in less inflation prone countries, such as Germany, Austria and, in its better days, Sweden. The income distribution may be unequal, as in Germany and as the Chancellor of the Exchequer would prefer, or it may be more egalitarian, as in Austria and Sweden. So long as it is accepted, inflation is not a problem.

Inflation is not a problem in this country that we can correct by norms for wage increases or, in their modern version, Government assumptions about increases in pay in the public sector. Uniform wage increases leave the distribution of income unchanged. A group of wage earners left behind stays left behind. What happens, particularly in the public sector, is that eventually the group gets so far behind that there is an outcry. The cry becomes, "Money on the table now." A big increase is won. The rate lurches upwards, only to begin the long slide, establishing the saw tooth lurch and slide for another 10 years.

If attention were concentrated in time not on today's gap or differentials but on the average relativity over the past 10 years, a sustainable objective could be agreed for different groups of workers. Then talk could be about how fast that group could move towards the objective. For example, there is general agreement on both sides of the House that teachers' pay has fallen far behind. If the Government leave the problem too long, we shall have another Houghton. Teachers will be better off for a few years and wastage and recruitment will temporarily improve, but the profession will soon fall behind again. The see-saw is not in the interests of either teachers or the Government because it does not allow evidence to emerge on what pay is needed steadily to attract, retain and motivate teachers with the ability that parents expect.

The risk in the exchange rate mechanism is that in any move towards economic and monetary union people will not learn in time how radically the game has changed. The exchange rate will not be allowed to move to accommodate freely any faster rate of inflation in the domestic economy so that we can continue to sell our goods.

It has not yet sunk in that increases in the cost of living cannot be the basis of wage increases. Ministers have not had the courage to say that, because it means admitting that last year's pay was higher than we could afford. If Ministers will not say clearly that cost of living increases cannot be the basis of wage increases, how can ordinary people be expected to believe it?

It is because I believe that people can understand the problem that I am prepared to argue that we were right to enter the exchange rate mechanism, but Ministers have an awful amount of explaining yet to do. Most forecasters outside the Treasury have written in one realignment to correct for the level at which we entered the exchange rate mechanism. However, they then say that if there is more than one realignment, that will undermine the credibility of Britain's commitment to the ERM, which could extend by years uncertainty, risk and higher interest rates in the United Kingdom with damaging effects all round.

We on this side of the House have often made the valid point that there are other factors in inflation and other types of income besides wages. However, incomes from employment, self-employment and social security benefits account for 90 per cent. of personal incomes, leaving only 10 per cent. derived from rent, dividends and interest. Capital gains may be equal to as much again as 10 per cent. of personal income. So there should be no cop-out in blaming the speculators when we divide the cake. The biggest trouble in capital markets in recent years has come from the price of houses bought and sold by ordinary people.

There is a major issue in the distribution of incomes. The Government have indulged their prejudices too far and they are reaping, and will continue to reap, the consequences. If as a country we continue to fight over the issue, that will be the death of us as an industrial nation.

What can the Government do besides being frank with the people? Let me deal first with a slightly technical point. Entering the exchange rate mechanism will not abolish the difficult judgments that every Chancellor must make. For example, our present troubles began with the over-reaction to the stock market crash of October 1987 and

[Dr. Bray]

that could happen equally with exchange rates fixed within Europe. Treasury Ministers have often said that everyone at the time was demanding yet bigger cuts in interest rates.

In October 1987, shortly after the crash, I sent a paper to the Treasury and to the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service reporting an exercise on the Treasury model using the Treasury's own policy optimisation programmes on the data and models available at the time. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury will recall that I raised this issue in the House during a debate on an order a week or so ago.

The policy adjustments required on the Government's own priorities in response to the fall in the stock market were indeed a reduction in interest rates, but by less than 0·5 per cent. and for one year, and a reduction of income tax of 0·1 per cent., which was so small as to be effectively zero. The trouble was that the analysis of the situation before the stock market crash, on the data available at the time, was already calling for increases in interest rates and income tax, but the then Chancellor was not prepared to listen.

Today, the new Chancellor acknowledged that the United Kingdom at that time was already enjoying, as he put it, strong growth. The evidence was there in the Treasury that the growth was so strong that restrictions should have been taken in the economy in October before the stock market crash. I am sure that comparable analyses were given to the Chancellor by Treasury officials using the same methods of analysis at the time. It would have saved the Government, not to mention the country, a lot of anguish if he had listened.

Now, the London Business School and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, as well as the Treasury, are using those policy optimisation methods. I doubt whether the Chancellor looks at the results. However, funds for research on the economic models and on the methods for using them are being cut by two thirds in the next academic year from £1·5 million a year to less than £0·5 million. It is typical of the stupidity and arrogance of Treasury Ministers that they think that they have nothing more to learn.

I now turn to the approach that Labour Members will take. I trust that we shall be more ready to learn than the present Government. I am sure that we shall be franker, too. We have been careful and disciplined in not making expenditure commitments and making it clear that we shall keep public expenditure within the limits of what the economy can afford at the time. However, as we approach the election—we have been quite clear about this point, too—the hardening of policies inevitably raises the general issue of public expenditure, taxation and disposable incomes.

There are two sources of change—shifts in shares of the cake as between disposable incomes, public expenditure and the role of taxation; and shifts from the growth of the cake. How quickly shares can be shifted depends on how much growth there is. There are three kinds of shifts—unconditional shifts, which we have limited to pensions and child benefit, short-term growth-generating shifts, which can contribute to growth within three to five years, and shifts that are conditional on growth.

Deeply and passionately though we are committed to increased resources for health and education, it is difficult to argue that they can generate growth in the short term in the way in which, say, industrial investment and training can. It is a measure of our seriousness and readiness for government that that is being said as much or more by our health and education spokesmen as by our Treasury spokesmen. We are so determined to deliver real improvements in health and education that we will not wreck things by an undisciplined splurge. I do not think that the Government will get anywhere by looking in our direction for campaigning propaganda.

If the Government get the politics right, the arithmetic is relatively straightforward for a Government who are prepared to learn, listen to advice, and do not think that they know all the answers. The trouble with the Government is that they get neither the politics nor the arithmetic right because they thought that they knew all the answers. It is a tragedy that the nation is paying such a heavy price in the deepening recession today.

9.17 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): May I first send Opposition Members' sympathy to the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who I understand is flu-ridden and to whose debut on another occasion we look forward?

We have seen the debut of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am sorry to say that it was, perhaps, a rather graceless debut by the right hon. Gentleman, and surprisingly so. It was not up to his usual high standard of courtesy. Perhaps he will do better another time when he is not so nervous. Despite the fact that the motion mentions recession, the Chancellor condemned my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) for not saying much about inflation, which the Chancellor said was the crucial issue of the economy and the only thing which really mattered. The Chancellor's words reminded me of an editorial in the *Financial Times* of 9 November which stated:

"Inflation, the previous chancellor"—

that is, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)—

"said, is 'judge and jury'. If so, the government is guilty of mismanagement and the Treasury of misforecasting."

Although the Chancellor argued that concentration on inflation should preclude discussion of the recession, the headline of that leading article was

"The UK slides into recession."

We were a little surprised that the Chancellor wanted to talk about inflation, since the current level is 10·9 per cent. —we await the new inflation figures with interest. The average inflation rate for the other European Community countries is 5·9 per cent. and for ERM countries it is 4·4 per cent. That the Government preferred to talk about inflation is an indication of how much they did not want to talk about the recession.

Most Conservative Members slid over—no doubt they would prefer to say "rose above"—any discussion of recession. If they mentioned it, they did so in passing in the midst of great praise for Government policies. That was not true of the excellent speeches of my right hon. and hon. Friends, in particular two sparkling maiden speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) and for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams). They spoke with far greater understanding of the reality of our economy than was evident in the speeches of Conservative Members.

Just a few days ago, I was talking to a group of business men in the south-east. They told me that it is more than a

year since they warned the Government that we were then, in their view and from their experience of business conditions at that time, approaching recession. All they got for their pains was a patronising little lecture on the folly and disloyalty of talking themselves into a recession. In fact, they were trying to talk themselves out of one by convincing the Government that there was a danger of a recession, in the hope that the Government might listen and change course. That was a year ago, but, judging from today's debate in December 1990, their message has still not got through.

It is important that we should place on record the true state of affairs, so that people outside, who must have been bewildered by much of today's debate, know that some of us, at least, are in touch with reality. In July 1990, a report appeared in *The Guardian* that contained a survey from KMPG Peat Marwick McClintock showing that the number of companies that have been placed into receivership had doubled. The same article contained a report by Dun and Bradstreet that business failures were at their highest level for 10 years.

I remind the House of reports in the *Financial Times* of 10 December that talked of the number of company failures being the "second highest on record" and added:

"bankruptcies may now be running at unprecedented levels."

The *Financial Times* also recorded the view of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. On 26 November, the Confederation of British Industry warned not just of a recession, but of severe recession. On 30 November, Barclays bank said that trading conditions had deteriorated since the summer and that the problems extended to all aspects of its loans nationwide. On 4 December, the National Council of Building Material Producers referred to conditions already in severe decline, which it said were likely to become worse next year. The following day, Oxford Economic Forecasting spoke of a decline in engineering output and mechanical and electrical engineering. It also spoke of the dangers and problems of recession. Only yesterday, retailers produced figures to show the biggest slump for 10 years.

Let us dispose of the idea that it is only grudging people on the Labour Benches who believe that the economy is in recession. The Government have been reluctant to make that admission. Last year, in front of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, the present Prime Minister, then Chancellor, was much more forthcoming. He was happy to give a definition of recession as a two-quarters decline in output. As the recession approached, however, the right hon. Gentleman's frankness receded. By October of this year he was admitting under pressure in the House that it was "conceivable" that there was a recession, although that was still not clear. He said that we would soon see, when the statistics were produced, whether there had been a recession.

By 8 November in the autumn statement the then Chancellor was sufficiently alarmed to get quite cross with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East because he dared to mention the word recession. The right hon. Gentleman claimed that my right hon. and learned Friend used the words

"in the way most calculated to alarm".

What a shocking thing to do! It conjured up

"an image quite different from the reality of what is happening or is expected to happen in future."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 125.]

The reports from which I have just quoted show who was really in touch with reality.

The Chancellor went on to talk about a period of "weak activity", which was as near as he could bring himself to using the word recession.

The present Chancellor, to give him credit, was prepared to tell the Select Committee last week that, although he would not go into definitions of recession, we were probably in one because, as he said,

"Business, I know, is pretty rough for people at the moment."

I had the distinct impression today that the Chancellor had had his knuckles rapped, since he was not as forthcoming in today's debate.

The Government's attitude to recession seems to be that we should not talk about recession while we are on the way into it—as if the people who mention it are more to blame than those whose policies caused it. We cannot be absolutely sure that there is a recession while it is happening because we cannot get the figures until afterwards. We must not talk about recession while we are in the middle of one, therefore, and it does not take much foresight to guess what the Chancellor will say when recession starts to diminish: there is no need to talk about it now because it is over. There seems to be no stage at which it is acceptable to use the word recession.

Apart from the fact of recession, we have been anxious to hear from the Government why we are in one. We have heard much recycled material from previous debates, as well as the old excuse that the Government made just one little mistake in 1987 when they cut interest rates when everyone else, including the Opposition, said that they should. Governments across the world cut interest rates in 1987 because of the stock market crash. The Government say that that created inflation and that we had to have a recession, as the Chancellor said today, to squeeze out that inflation.

The Government always leave out of this explanation the fact that the 1987 cuts in interest rates were followed by the 1988 cuts in income tax. The Chancellor again argued today that they were of no significance. The Opposition disagree. We think that those income tax cuts added in a full year, as I recall, £6 billion to demand——

Mr. Norman Lamont *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: The Chancellor said about £3 billion; the lowest figure previously quoted was £4 billion. We shall let it pass—substantial sums were involved. Quite apart from them, a signal was sent by the tax cuts and by the rhetoric that accompanied them——

Mr. Tim Smith *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: The Opposition and the Government will never agree about whether any of this mattered, but there is evidence that the Government's claim that they did nothing wrong except for the 1987 cuts in interest rates is false. After all, it was not only the United Kingdom that cut interest rates. The other G7 countries did, too. So why are we in recession? What happened to the other countries that also made this one mistake, given that the Government do not admit that any of their other actions thereafter were a mistake?

Let us compare the inflation figures. Inflation is 10·9 per cent. here compared with 4 per cent. when we cut interest rates in 1987. The rate in Italy is 6·5 per cent., in Germany

[Mrs. Beckett]

3·1 per cent., and in France 3·8 per cent.—all higher than the percentages in 1987, but nothing like as high as our inflation.

Growth in France is up from 2·4 to 3 per cent.; in Germany it is up to 5 per cent.; in Italy it is down a little, but not by much. Here it is down to 0·5 per cent. and falling, because we are in recession.

As for the balance of payments, Germany has a bigger surplus now than in 1987. France is in much the same position, and Italy is slightly worse, but our balance of payments deficit had quadrupled as a proportion of gross domestic product, and we are alone in that. In October 1987, when the Government made that one mistake, we did not have the highest interest rates in Europe, but we have now.

Mr. Tim Smith: I do not know where all this is leading us. Most economic commentators accept that a too-lax monetary policy led to higher inflation. In 1988-89, after the 1988 Budget about which the hon. Lady expresses so much concern and in which tax rates were cut, we moved to a much tighter fiscal policy and had a very large public sector debt repayment.

Mrs. Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am saying that the Government claim that the only mistake that they made was in 1987. The hon. Gentleman and I may disagree about the relevance of the different factors, but the Government say that nothing that they have done since 1987 has added to the problem. If they have not added to the problem, why is Britain the only country that is in recession?

The Government say that they made one mistake and the argument is about whether it led us to further problems. Since then, the Government have scored a series of inflationary own goals. Those were the increases in electricity and water charges in order to fatten those industries for privatisation; the increases in rents insisted on by the former Secretary of State for the Environment in order to make council rents competitive with those in the private sector; and increases in fares forced on the transport industry by Government policies. There has also been the imposition of the poll tax and, of course, the increases in interest rates. The Government have used interest rates, and interest rates alone, to resolve the problems that were being created.

We now have the consequences of a two-year squeeze to reduce the inflationary pressures in the economy that the Government had created. I should like to draw attention to two aspects of the consequences of that squeeze. Yesterday the National Westminster bank report drew attention to the bank's forecast that unemployment will rise by 700,000 over the next 18 months because of the severity of the recession. In the first half of 1990, more than 95,000 people had mortgage arrears of more than six months. Those people have serious debt problems as a result of the Government's policies. Not unrelated to that is the acknowledgement this week from the Government of the increase in homelessness. Some 72,830 households were officially accepted as homeless in the first six months of this year. Hon. Members know that the actual figure substantially exceeds the official figure.

Let us look at the future of the economy. In January the CBI said:

"The danger that investment plans will be undermined by the high cost of capital, the squeeze on profits, and slower growth, is the most serious risk that the UK is facing at present".

That was in January and since then manufacturing investment is only 5 to 6 per cent. above the 1979 level from which it fell so catastrophically in the Government's first recession in the early 1980s. In the third quarter of this year manufacturing investment was 7 per cent. down on the same period last year, and manufacturing output fell by more than 1 per cent. in just one month towards the end of the summer. The very cuts in investment that cause most danger to our economy are taking place.

I should like to draw attention to correspondence that has been passing between the Government and the Machine Tool Technologies Association. In a letter, the association says:

"it has become evident . . . that despite the claims of Government, investment in advanced technology by UK manufacturing has declined sharply since the beginning of this year."

It drew attention to the fact that export figures show that overseas manufacturers are investing in high technology, and that their exports have increased by 27 per cent. in the first nine months of the year. The association says that it believes that lack of investment in this country

"is due to the lack of a favourable economic climate which would allow for large scale, long term investment in advanced technology. This is vital if we are to maintain a competitive productive capacity as a manufacturing nation."

The chairman of ICI recently pointed out that we shall not have economic growth for the next two years and that

"this time, unlike in the Eighties, growth had to be based on 'solid industrial substance—not the shadow or 'fluff' of the second half of the Eighties, which has so swiftly evaporated in the current harsher economic climate'."

He was talking about the ridiculous effects of the Government's policies.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) said, the Government talk of a potential soft landing, but it is more likely to be a nasty thump as we hit rock bottom and an ugly scraping as we are carried along into recession. The Labour party argues, although the Government contest it, that part of the reason for our problems is the way that the Government got their signals to the economy and the country wrong in 1978-88. They are doing it again. They claim that, in order to make a success of our membership of the exchange rate mechanism, there must be sacrifices, an understanding of how we have to become more competitive, and a willingness to rein back our demands. Therefore, to make a success of ERM, people have to understand that there may be difficult times ahead and we must make the right adjustments to ensure that our economy is competitive.

However, so that they can win the election, Conservative Members are already saying, as they will increasingly say, exactly the opposite—there is not really a problem, it is just another of those little blips so immortalised by the right hon. Member for Blaby. They claim that the problem is nearly over, it is just a short hiccup and soon everything will be all right. These messages are incompatible, as the well-being of the economy is incompatible, with the return of the Conservative party to government.

Perhaps what was most alarming about the Chancellor's speech was his reiteration that there will be no change in Government policy and that——

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Member was not present throughout the debate and I have only three minutes left if I am not to cut into the Minister's time.

The alarming thing about the Chancellor's speech was that he said that there would be no change in Government policy and that it remained their objective to cut income tax further. He rounded his speech off with an extraordinary statement, to which a number of my hon. Friends have referred, and which will be the most remembered statement of the debate. It was that the Government believe in the equal right of everyone to be unequal. That will ring round cardboard city for many a month to come.

What was saddening about today's debate was the tone of it. There was nonsense about the Labour party having no policy and claims that the House had heard nothing. The reason for that is simple. The Labour party talks about promoting investment in education, about the need for investment in education and training and in research and development. Conservative Members do not think that is an economic policy. But let them say that to the Germans, French or Japanese. They will be thrown out on their ears and thought to be crazy.

Conservative Members may not have studied the papers carefully in the past week or so, so let me remind them that our economic proposals—the policy which they say does not exist—have been put through the Treasury model and there is evidence to suggest that we might produce rather better results than the present Government. So let us have no more of this childish, petty, silly suggestion that we have no policy.

If we want to build a world-class economy we must invest the national dividend in the nation's future. Despite what the Chancellor said, I hope that we shall hear from the Financial Secretary tonight that there will be no more tax cuts until we have the world-class economy and services that we need and deserve. We remember how, when the Chancellor was Chief Secretary, he told us that one often has to make a choice between public expenditure —public investment—and income tax cuts. We want to hear from the Financial Secretary that he recognises that the need of the country is for public investment and not for further income tax cuts.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East drew attention to the Chancellor's less than felicitious words about the Titanic. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has reminded me of the poet who wrote that those with tinkling glasses were the last to notice that the Titanic was sinking. The first to notice were those below decks in the engine room who were trying to plug the holes.

If the economy is the Titanic, the Government are the orchestra, still playing the same old tunes. Despite those tunes, hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens face a Christmas blighted by the fear or reality of the unemployment, bankruptcy and homelessness that accompany the recession brought about by the Government's policies. They will find neither comfort nor hope in the Chancellor's speech. For that, they need a Labour Government.

9.41 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): The debate started with two distinguished maiden speeches from the hon. Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). It must be exceptional—particularly in the middle of a Parliament —to have two new hon. Members from the same town, and they both distinguished themselves greatly. The hon. Member for Paisley, North spoke exceptionally movingly and eloquently. Like other hon. Members, I knew her late husband Allen and worked with him. We shared in the mysteries of the Whips' Office, serving on Committees and so on. He had genuine friends on both sides of the House. We miss him, but we welcome her. Her speech lent lustre to the debate, and we look forward to hearing many more contributions from her.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South also distinguished himself in an exceptionally good speech—if I may say so as one who has also not been in the House for very long. It was most impressive and we look forward to hearing many more. The hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Norman Buchan, was a salutary reminder to us all that there is a life for politicians outside politics. That is something that we tend to forget.

Other than those two speeches, and save for some distinguished speeches from my hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who cannot be here for the winding-up speeches, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) and many others—we have had what one might call a quiet debate. That is somewhat surprising considering the vehemence of the Opposition's motion and their apparent anxiety about the state of the economy.

We have made no bones about the fact that one of the causes of the present downturn in the economy is to be found in the measures that we have had to take to counter inflation. That illustrates the essential point, which we have been trying to din into the Labour party, with limited success, for years: the deadliest enemy of long-term growth and prosperity is inflation. The last Labour Prime Minister had it right when he said that inflation is the mother and father of unemployment.

We have been clear and straightforward about the reasons why we have a problem with inflation at the moment. In 1987 and 1988, our monetary policy was not as tight as it should have been, for reasons which led to almost universal support for our policy at the time. We must be fair to the Labour party. It did not support our monetary policy at the time—not because it was too loose, but because it thought it was too tight.

Whatever the circumstances, the Opposition said that interest rates were still too high and that they should be lowered even more. We all remember them saying that; but, oddly enough, the Leader of the Opposition does not. We all think of things after the event that we would have liked to have said at the time, but would it not be more straightforward if the Leader of the Opposition were now to say that he has it wrong and that he was not saying, "Steady, steady?"

The Government have been straightforward and have accepted that mistakes were made. It would be nice if the Labour party could, just this once, bring itself to admit that, on the basis of what it said at the time, it would have doubled, redoubled and compounded those mistakes.

Dr. Bray *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I am sorry, but I do not have the time to give way.

One of the most remarkable assertions made during the debate was made by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who said that tax cuts fuelled the growth in demand. We were running a fiscal policy as tight as there had ever been in this country, and we had a budget surplus as large as any in the world. Some £14 billion of budget surplus was taken out of the economy.

Dr. Bray *rose*——

Mr. Maude: No, I will not give way. I have only a limited time available and I must press on with my speech.

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I am sorry, but I will not give way. I must press on with my speech.

Demand having increased too much, we had to rein back by raising interest rates——

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I am not giving way. I have only 14 minutes left, and I will not give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Government had to rein back by increasing interest rates. That we did——

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maude: No.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have had long experience in the House. Is it the usual custom for a Minister to refuse to give way to the main Opposition spokesman? Is it not discourteous of the Minister——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. That is a matter for the Minister.

Mr. Maude: I have ended up with much less time to speak than the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) had, although I have rather more to say.

Interest rates have had to go up. It has been painful, but that process——

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maude: No, I will not give way. The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke at considerable length this afternoon, although he had nothing to say. I have only a short time to say rather a lot, and I propose to say it.

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I can well understand why the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not want to listen to what I have to say, because what the Government say is the truth. I propose to get on with my speech and say it.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Under the rules of debate, the Government have the privilege of winding up. Surely the Opposition should be allowed to put questions to the Government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat that that is a matter for the hon. Member who has the floor, in this case the Minister.

Mr. Maude: Such bogus points of order make me even less inclined to give way——

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister referred personally to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). It is the convention of the House that an hon. Member who is referred to personally has a right to reply. This is an Opposition Supply day and we are discussing an Opposition motion——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. McKay: It is an Opposition——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat when I am on my feet. These are not points of order——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is entitled to a hearing. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) had a fair hearing, and I ask the House to give a fair hearing to the Minister.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will remember that when the proceedings of the House were first televised one of the rules laid down was that if an hon. Member is mentioned——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These are bogus points of order. They are not matters for the Chair, and I very much hope that hon. Members will allow the Minister to resume his speech.

Mr. Hood *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that these are not matters for the Chair, and they seem to be intended to disrupt the Minister's speech.

Mr. Hood *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall call the Minister to resume his speech, and I hope that the House will give him an opportunity to address the House for the remainder of the debate.

Mr. Maude: This is an Opposition day, as it has been pointed out, and it is conspicuous that we have had two speeches from Opposition spokesmen who have had little to say. It is not particularly surprising that, when a Minister chooses to talk about Government policy, about the real world as it is, Opposition Members go in for organised barracking and bogus points of order to try to reduce the amount of time available to the Minister to tell the truth about what is happening.

Dr. Bray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I am sorry; I shall not give way.

It cannot be said too often that low inflation is an essential condition for sustained economic growth in the 1990s, and we shall do whatever is necessary to lower it. The present slowdown is bound to be painful. It is clear

that across a number of sectors demand in the economy is static or falling. But however much Opposition Members want it to be so, this is not a replay of the recession of 1980-81. Then output fell in five successive quarters and by 5 per cent. in total. Today we expect a fall in demand and in GDP between the two halves of this year with a recovery during 1991 as inflation recedes. That is confirmed by independent forecasters.

The reason for that difference is simple. In 1980-81 we had to pick up the pieces after years of drift, disorder and disillusion. Those were years in which inflation soared to 27 per cent. The British economy's growth rate was the worst in Europe. Investment hardly increased and the country was forced to beg from the International Monetary Fund.

Today there is a different story. Our problems have their source in too much confidence, not too little, in too fast a growth in investment, not too slow. The downturn is a necessary adjustment after a period of excessive and unsustainable demand.

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I will not.

It means that we must learn better how to manage a dynamic economy. The Labour party's only task in power was to manage a declining economy.

In 1980-81 we had to pick the economy up by the scruff of its neck. After years of misdirection and neglect we had to begin to fashion the circumstances in which fundamental changes of attitude could take place. The 1980s were the only decade since the war in which we had an average growth rate higher than Germany and France, higher productivitity growth than Japan, living standards higher than ever, more shareholders, more home owners, more businesses, more people self-employed, 2 million more people in work, investment higher than it had been and a sustained period of fast growth and low inflation.

Some have argued that the currency should be depreciated to enable British exporters to compete. What rubbish. The great exporters of the 1980s, Germany and Japan, increased their exports dramatically at a time when their currencies were not depreciating but appreciating. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) who claimed that somehow we should devalue is way off.

Some hon. Members—including, again, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West—derided the services sector, suggesting that we should not place too much emphasis on it. We should be clear about this: the jobs in that industry are real jobs, and form part of the real economy. Hon. Members should not sneer at the people who do those jobs; they are producing wealth for the country, and we should respect and support their work.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Maude: Opposition Members do not support what is done by businesses. Labour talks about manufacturing industry as though it owned it——

Mr. Battle: Give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Battle: The Minister will not give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to the debate in a parliamentary manner.

Mr. Maude: I suppose that at one stage the Labour party did own quite a lot of manufacturing industry, but, happily, most of it has now been liberated from state ownership into genuine public ownership, where it prospers and will continue to do so. British Steel, for instance, is now one of the most efficient and profitable steel producers in the world, with more than 10 per cent. of the European Community steel market—the second largest share. That is another classic case of abject failure under Labour being turned into shining success under the Conservatives.

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I am not going to give way; I am going to carry on.

This has been an Opposition day, and an outside observer might have expected the Opposition to take the opportunity to tell us a little about their policies. I know that the hon. Member for Derby, South thinks it frightfully rude to talk about them, but she and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not know whether it is one yet.

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am a relatively new Member, but, to my knowledge, this is the first time that a Front Bencher has refused to give way——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is perfectly in order, and is frequently done.

Mr. Maude: Time and again, we waited for the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and the hon. Member for Derby, South to tell us—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] They have already had an hour and a half between them: they have had plenty of time in which to disclose to a wondering world what their policies are. Time and again we waited, poised to hear those policies; time and again, the wondering world was disappointed.

I am bound to say, however, that that demonstrates a modicum of wisdom on the part of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and a difference, perhaps even a split—an important split—between him and the Leader of the Opposition. When the Leader of the Opposition—maybe I should say, "the Leader of the Opposition for the time being"—has nothing to say, he goes ahead and says it anyway; when the right hon. and learned Gentleman has nothing to say, he takes refuge in silence. "Don't watch my lips", one might call it.

Mr. Hood: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister has again referred to a Member whom he has refused the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. If the Minister will not give way, an hon. Member must resume his seat. I have not observed any Opposition Front Bencher trying to intervene.

Mr. Maude: I am endeavouring to be sympathetic to Opposition Front Benchers, because I understand that there is little that they can do. Their only policy was to recommend our joining the exchange rate mechanism. One can see the benefits to them of such a policy. It can be

[Mr. Maude]

summed up in three letters; as long as they got those letters in the right order, it was a memorable policy, and they could rely on their colleagues to mouth it again and again. Now that we have joined the ERM, however, they are left with nothing, and they are bewildered.

Labour's historic mission was to undermine and destroy capitalism, to destroy free enterprise. What Labour and its fellow practitioners across the world have achieved is destructive not of capitalism but of socialism. All round the world they are reading the funeral rites of socialism. Only here does the Labour party continue with its crusade.

Mr. Hood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Maude: No. Socialism is finished. Free enterprise works. In that lies our future.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 328.

Division No. 27] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs. Irene
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the improvement in economic performance over the last 11 years and on its maintenance of tight monetary and fiscal policies necessary to reduce inflation which have been reinforced by membership of the ERM; and notes that inflationary pressures are now easing as a prelude to falling inflation and the resumption of sustainable growth.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Speaker: I ask hon. Members to leave the Chamber quietly if they are not remaining for this debate. I should announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8072/90 and 9601/90 on non-standard work; and endorses the Government's view that, in the light of the 1·6 million new part-time jobs created in the United Kingdom since March 1983 and the overwhelming preference of part-time workers for part-time rather than full-time work, the Government should not accept proposals which would greatly increase the cost of employing part-time and temporary workers and would significantly reduce the number of jobs, thereby damaging the competitiveness of our industry, and that of the European Community.

I begin by apologising to the Scrutiny Committee for the fact that it has had very little time to consider the new explanatory memoranda on the revised versions of these directives. As I am sure hon. Members will appreciate, the new documents were received only at the end of last month, just in time for the Social Affairs Council on 26 November.

This debate is timely, as it allows me to outline the Government position in the run-up to the next Social Affairs Council on 18 December, where these three directives will again be considered.

The motion concerns three proposed directives which the European Commission published earlier this year as part of the social action programme to implement the social charter.

I should like to make a few general points which will, I hope, help to put this debate into context. The Government believe that what the Community does must pass the test of three criteria—those for Community action which were unanimously agreed at the Madrid European Council in June 1989. This implies looking at each Commission proposal on its merits and asking the following three questions. First, will the proposal encourage the creation of jobs for the people of Europe? Secondly, if the proposal passes this test, is action necessary at Community level? Finally, if such action is shown to be necessary, does the proposal respect the different national traditions and practices which exist in the Community?

The social action programme contains nearly 50 proposals which the Commission has committed itself to bringing forward by the end of next year. About half the proposals are for legally binding directives. That represents a significant volume of new regulation of employment and social affairs. Overall, we hope to be able to accept most of the Commission's proposals, especially on health and safety. Others pose great problems for the United Kingdom and at least two of the three directives referred to in the Government motion fall into that category.

Before getting on to the detail of the motion, I should like to say a word about our commitment to the European Community. The true criterion for commitment is the extent to which countries have implemented and put into effect measures that the Community has already agreed. On that criterion, our record of commitment is outstanding.

Let me give some figures. Of the 107 measures due for implementation by March of this year under the single market programme, the United Kingdom had failed to implement only 18. That is an excellent record. There is a yawning gap between our performance and that of those at the bottom of the league. For example, Italy still must implement no fewer than 62 single market measures.

Our record in the social area is even better. At the last Social Affairs Council in November the Commission produced a report on implementation of existing EC social legislation throughout the Community. According to the Commission's own figures, the United Kingdom leads all other member states; and of the 18 existing directives in the social field, we are the only member state to have implemented all of them.

It is also worth looking at the extent to which countries take rapid action to comply with judgments of the European Court of Justice when legislation to enact measures approved by the Community is held to be deficient. We have only one judgment outstanding. Germany has 12 and Italy 37. Those are figures in which we can justifiably take pride. In my view, they are not sufficiently well known or understood, but they illustrate and underline our commitment to the Community.

The three draft directives referred to in the motion amount to a package of measures covering part-time and temporary work—what the Commission, rather unhappily, calls "atypical" or "non-standard" work.

The first directive deals with

"certain employment relationships with regard to working conditions",

to use the Commission's wording. We normally refer to it for convenience as the article 100 directive, referring to the fact that the Commission has put it forward under article 100 of the treaty of Rome. The directive contains a large number of proposals governing the working conditions of part-time and temporary workers, excluding those who work an average of less than eight hours a week, but including temporary staff working through employment businesses and also those on fixed-term contracts.

The second directive concerns

"certain employment relationships with regard to distortions of competition",

again to use the Commission's own wording. For convenience, we normally refer to that as the article 100A directive, to distinguish it from the other two, which are put forward on different legal bases. This draft directive contains a number of provisions intended to remove alleged distortions of competition caused by different rules in member states governing the employment of part-time and temporary workers. It is subject to the same exclusion and inclusion which I have just mentioned on the article 100 directive.

I say in parenthesis at this point that the Commission has produced no evidence to substantiate its allegations about "distortion of competition". Many part-timers are in fact employed in the non-trading sector where competitiveness is unlikely to be affected by differences in their treatment. Furthermore, any competitive distortion of this kind is insignificant compared with the much greater differences in labour costs resulting from differences in pay levels and overall social security provision.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Finally, the third draft directive deals with the health and safety of temporary workers.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Before my hon. Friend the Minister moves on from the article 100A directive, can he tell us whether the Government believe that 100A is the appropriate article, bearing in mind that these very expensive and silly regulations can now be imposed on the United Kingdom, whether we like it or not? Do the Government accept article 100A? How can all this be happening when apparently we have not even signed the social charter?

Mr. Forth: As usual, my hon. Friend has made a telling point. Indeed we did not sign the social charter and this programme flows from it. We have taken to ourselves the right, as a member state, to examine each element in the programme on its merits and to apply to it the tests to which I have just referred to see whether the measures are appropriate or worthwhile. As I have said, we believe that some of the measures, particularly with regard to health and safety, are defensible and desirable and they will have our support. However, as I was about to say, we do not believe that the other measures on atypical work deserve our support, certainly not in their present form. The truth is that we do not accept that the legal base is sound and we have indicated our unhappiness and dissatisfaction about that. That is a cause of continuing discussion in the Council of Ministers. I hope that I can satisfy my hon. Friend more fully later in my speech, although I doubt it.

I was about to refer to the directive known in shorthand as the article 118A directive. I should make it clear at the outset that the Government support the principle of the article 118 directive on the health and safety of temporary workers. A broad measure of agreement has been reached in official discussions on this proposal. While some important points of detail still need to be resolved—for example, we need, in particular, to ensure a flexible requirement that does not impose unnecessary burdens on industry—I am sure that the Council of Ministers could move fairly quickly to a common position on this directive.

However, the other two draft directives pose great problems and are in our view misguided. Our view is that the Commission's proposals would greatly increase the costs of employing part-time and temporary workers. They would significantly reduce the number of jobs and thereby damage not only our industrial competitiveness, but that of the European Community as a whole.

It may help if I set the scene on part-time and temporary work in the Community as a whole before referring to the position in the United Kingdom.

Throughout Europe, employers are having to find new and more flexible forms of work to attract into jobs the peope whom they need for their businesses. The number of part-time and temporary jobs in the Community has grown rapidly in recent years, and there are now 14 million part-time employees, and 10 million temporary workers throughout the Community.

Community labour markets are extremely diverse. For example, part-time work is unusual in Italy, Portugal and Greece. But in Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom more than one in five jobs are part-time. As far as temporary workers are concerned, in some countries, such as Spain, Portugal and Greece, about one in five employees are employed on a temporary basis. By contrast, in Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom only about one in 20 jobs fall into that category. It is worth noting that in Italy temporary work is very strictly controlled.

But all the signs are that employers will need to create more flexible job opportunities in response to changes in industries and occupations and the nature of work itself. The demographic changes that are taking place throughout Europe mean that employers will increasingly need to take on women and older workers. Moreover, there will be increasing demand for part-time and other flexible opportunities.

What is the Commission's response to that? There is a clear signal in its description of part-time and temporary work as "non-standard" or "atypical". It appears to think of part-time and temporary work as in some way second-rate and unpopular with employees.

That is certainly not the experience of the United Kingdom. Nor does it square with the experience in other Community countries, where the unsatisfied demand for part-time work is such that there are many applications for every part-time vacancy advertised.

In the United Kingdom, almost a quarter of our employed work force is part-time—about 6·5 million people. Clearly, there is nothing "atypical" about part-time work here. Well over 1·5 million new part-time jobs have been created since 1983 and there is clear evidence that the demand for part-time jobs will continue to increase.

Moreover—this point is crucial—there is no doubt that part-time work is popular with employees in this country, as well as with employers. People who work part time in Britain do not think that they are second-best to those who work full time. They work part time because they want to.

The most recent labour force survey shows that fewer than one in 14 work part time because they cannot find a full-time job. Part-time work is particularly popular with women. Only 6 per cent. of women with part-time jobs took them because they could not find a full-time job. A survey commissioned by the CBI in the spring of 1990 showed that 80 per cent. of women in Britain who want to return to work in the next five years will be looking for part-time work.

The Commission's approach to part-time and temporary work would put at risk all those desirable developments. The effect of this proposal would clearly be to make part-time and temporary work more expensive for employers and more difficult for them to organise. There can be only one result of that—fewer opportunities for part-time work.

My Department's economists have estimated that the direct impact costs of the Commission's proposals to employers in the United Kingdom would be about £1 billion. The figure does not include the increased burden of regulation associated with the directives. Therefore, the implementation of those directives in the United Kingdom would imperil thousands of jobs.

The social security aspects of those proposals would also have a direct effect on the pay of many employees. For those 1·75 million employees in Britain who work part time and earn less than £46 per week, the proposals would actually have the effect of reducing their take-home pay by making them liable to pay national insurance contributions for the first time.

We are not alone in our views. Unlike most other member states, we consulted widely on the Commission's proposals. Almost every response from United Kingdom employers saw the potential in the proposals for costs to increase and the inevitable consequences for their ability to create jobs.

The general approach of the Government to these matters is to encourage employers to create part-time and flexible job opportunities. That is good for efficiency and it is what gives choice to employees. It means avoiding the unnecessary regulation of employment, which would add to employers' costs and make it harder for them to create jobs, while maintaining a strong framework of essential employment protection.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): The Minister mentioned consultation and employers. Who else did he consult? Specifically, did he consult trade unions?

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed. We consulted several hundred organisations and companies and undertakings. Overwhelmingly, the response from employers who create wealth and provide job opportunities was hostile to the directives.

Perhaps surprisingly, the trade unions generally support the measures. That confirms my long-held belief that the trade unions are no longer interested in employment and jobs. They might be interested in providing misguided protection for those relatively few of their members who are left, but they are not interested in providing increased job opportunities for people who tend not to be trade union members. The response from the trade unions is revealing and damaging.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Given that the Institute of Personnel Management has made the same kind of welcoming noises to the directives, does the Minister also believe that that institute is not interested in employment and jobs?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The institute welcomed some elements of the directives, but, equally, it thought that some others would be damaging. I think that it would be fair to characterise its response as somewhat mixed. Although the hon. Gentleman is entitled to take a selective view of what one body said——

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Minister is also being selective.

Mr. Forth: I did not mention the Institute of Personnel Management; I am simply responding to the question. I want to ensure that the House is not misguided by what the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): My hon. Friend has rightly described how the British Government have consulted with employers and paid heed to their valuable contribution. It might be more positive if the Governments of Germany and Portugal took more note of what their employers have said. The Select Committee on Employment recently visited those countries and we were pleasantly surprised at the degree of scepticism and, in some instances, the sheer opposition of employers' organisations to the directives issued as a result of the social charter. They are are opposed for the very reasons that my hon. Friend has expertly advanced tonight.

Mr Forth: My hon. Friend has made an important and striking point.

Although we make efforts to consult widely on such matters—such efforts are also made by other Departments such as the Department of Trade and Industry—it is noticeable that most of the other member states do not have the mechanism, or the will, so to consult. That explains why politicians from the continent can come to the Council of Ministers and support such measures, which can damage employment prospects. Apparently they are unwilling to acknowledge those potentially damaging effects because they have failed to consult their employers—their wealth creators—or other representatives. That is damaging not only to those member states, but to the Community.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I gladly give way to the newly elected chairman of the Back-Bench European affairs committee.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems is that the other EC member states do not scrutinise the legislation properly? Although we may have to improve our methods of scrutiny, those countries have an absolute requirement to do so. Many things are not sorted out at the appropriate level in the Community because other member states do not go through the stuff in the right manner, while we are trying to do it even better.

Mr. Forth: That is correct.

Often measures before the Council of Ministers have hardly been scrutinised in the sense that the House would understand the meaning of that word. Often we have to force other countries to undertake such scrutiny and that leads to allegations of unhelpfulness, when the reverse is true. We are trying to make things workable and effective, but our attempts are often misconstrued as being negative.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is not it true that the Italian president of the Social Affairs Council, Sr. Donat Cattin, admitted that people did not realise what they had signed up to under the social charter?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has demonstrated his usual perception.

The presidency has been disappointed to note that, now that we have got to the detail behind the measures contained in the social action programme, many member states that had rushed quickly to sign up to the social charter are now beginning to wonder whether those measures are what they bargained for. That explains the change in attitude in the Council of Ministers as we reach the later stages of the development of the social action programme.

Mr. Flynn: I hate to interrupt the chorus of self-adulation among Conservative Members, but I must point out that the Government are highly selective in the way that they treat the representations that they receive. They recently consulted on statutory sick pay. Every trade union and organisation of employees and of employers said that it was opposed to the changes in SSP, because they would rob industry of jobs and hence of its ability to employ people. The Government wholly ignored that consultation, yet tonight they pretend to be responding to consultation. When they disagree with the results of consultation, they ignore it.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his own interpretation. I was not responsible for the DSS consultation on SSP, but I am sure that it was comprehensive and detailed. In my experience, once changes of the sort mentioned by the hon. Gentleman have been carefully explained to those affected by them, they see them in a more positive light. I have found when dealing with small business, for which I am responsible, that, once people have the true nature of the changes explained to them, they respond more positively. That gives the lie to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. But as we are not debating statutory sick pay this evening, I do not want to use up any more time——

Mr. Flynn *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I really must get on. The hon. Gentleman has introduced a red herring to the debate, and we should now allow it to rest.

The Commission's proposals on part-time and temporary work deal with matters that are best left to individual member states to decide. In other words, the proposals offend against the Commission's own principle of subsidiarity—the principle that action should not be taken at Community level unless the objective can be achieved only by action at that level; and that such action should go no further than is necessary to achieve the objective.

The proposals are costly. They are unnecessary. They are also counter-productive because they would harm the interests of the very people whom they seek to protect. The result would be a loss of jobs throughout the Community.

The effect on employers would be equally disastrous. They would face restrictions on their ability to organise and to afford the flexible working patterns that they and their employees need. At the same time, businesses throughout the European Community must continue to compete with businesses in countries such as the United States of America and Japan, to say nothing of the newly industrialised countries, which do not have similar restrictions. It is significant that in the 15 years between 1973 and 1988 total employment in the Community grew by only 5 per cent. Over the same period employment in the United States of America grew by 35 per cent.

The Commission takes no notice of all this. It has not even entered its head. For example, it is astonishing that it has put forward its proposals without making any assessment of the impact that the proposals would have on employers' costs and on jobs in the Community.

It is often suggested that we are on our own in having doubts about the Commission's proposals on part-time and temporary work. That is quite wrong. It was clear from the last meeting of the Social Affairs Council on 26 November—my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made this point—that other member states shared a number of the United Kingdom's doubts and reservations about the Commission's proposals, both on the legal base and on the substance. That Council meeting showed that when the Community gets down to discussing the reality of actual proposals, our priorities and our concerns are shared widely throughout the rest of the Community. I welcome the realism and pragmatism of that approach.

We will continue to challenge the need for these directives, while playing a full and constructive part in discussions on them. During the negotiations we will urge our Community partners to ensure that whatever we do at Community level will help, instead of hinder, employers in every Community country to create the part-time and other job opportunities which the people of Europe want and which employers need.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will the Minister give way? He promised to answer a specific point.

Mr. Forth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. Forth: No.

Mr. Taylor: That is unfair.

10.39 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, to leave out from "work" to the end of the Question, and to insert instead thereof:

"recognises the significant increase in the numbers and proportion of people in the United Kingdom labour force engaged in part-time and temporary work; is aware that many people, including a high percentage of women workers, rely on such work in the absence of full-time employment or to fit in with other demands on their time; is conscious of the important economic contribution of such workers; believes that measures designed to put the working conditions of such people on the same footing as full-time employees is in itself socially desirable and would reduce any artificial incentive for employers to create part-time rather than full-time work.".

I shall leave Conservative Members to continue their internal row while the Opposition continue to speak for the interests of the nation and for the interests of those people, mainly women, who are engaged in part-time work. I am pleased to be accompanied by the Opposition spokesman on women's issues, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson). I contrast that with the attitude of the Prime Minister, who failed to appoint a woman to his Cabinet.

We are debating the social charter, about which the Minister and his hon. Friends have become quite excited. The debate is important because, as the Minister has said, it is the first debate on the substance of the social charter. It is a great shame that Conservative Members talk about consultation and the demerits of Europe's devious Foreign Ministers. The Council of Ministers had already met to discuss the directives before the House had an opportunity to debate them.

The Minister shows contempt for our democratic processes by complaining about consultation by other bodies, when it is obvious that the Government did not make a meaningful attempt to bring about consultation. Conservative Members who read the Government's consultation document might be surprised to find that the Government's consultation offer was couched in a way that would lead a casual reader to conclusions warranted only by the premises in that so-called consultation document. It answered its own questions, and as an exercise in consultation it was nothing more than a hollow joke.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: No.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman is frightened to give way.

Mr. Lloyd: We are debating not only progressive measures from the European Commission but also the way in which the Government are prepared to sabotage the interests of our working people. By their stupid and crass approach to European matters, the Government are jeopardising not only the position of part-time workers but their own position. I shall develop that matter later.

Mr. Janman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It proves that he is not frightened. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the Government are sabotaging the interests of working people? I emphasise the word "working". If the Government were to support the directive on part-time working and some of the other European Commission directives, there would be a substantial reduction in the number of people in work.

Mr. Lloyd: I invite the hon. Gentleman to listen carefully to my speech. I hope that I can set his mind at rest and that he will have the intellectual honesty to vote with the Opposition on this matter. By being alarmist, the Government may please Conservative Members, but such an approach serves no useful purposes to employers or to employees.

The Minister has said that, throughout Europe, there are about 14 million part-time workers and about 10 million temporary workers. In Britain there are well over 5 million part-time workers. The Minister says 6 million, but we are not here to quibble over the exact figure or to deny that part-time work plays an important part in our economy. Our amendment makes it clear that we value the contribution of part-time workers and recognise their importance and the importance of such work as a means of offering flexibility to employers and employees. In so far as the relationship is acceptable to both parties, the Opposition are as determined as anybody to make sure that part-time work remains a useful and successful part of the national working and economic scenes.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the hon. Gentleman also recognise that there is a difference between temporary and part-time work, and that both are equally important?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree, and the Labour party has no objection to temporary work. Many employers are beginning to employ part-time and temporary workers on contracts equivalent to those offered to full-time workers. The Incomes Data Service found in its study of June of this year that, out of a sample of 32 companies, all but five had made improvements to the conditions of part-time workers over the past five years, and had moved them more into line with full-time workers. We know from evidence given to the Select Committee on Employment that Unilever feels that it gets a 9 per cent. productivity advantage by employing part-time workers. Many firms in banking, finance and retail are beginning to bring part-time conditions into line with those for full-time workers. Ford has recently announced that it intends to employ part-time workers so as to get over problems of absenteeism.

Government Departments, such as the Treasury and the Customs and Excise, have moved some way towards approximating conditions for both full and part-time workers. In none of those companies and Departments has the cry gone up that they are either jeopardising employment or introducing an unnecessary financial burden. The House must understand that many enlightened employers already recognise that it is in their interests, both in moral and productivity terms, to make sure that this happens. In some cases, this is because both local or national skill shortages, or demographic changes, have meant that employers have had to take into account the need to provide flexible employment conditions so as to attract into work people who would not otherwise be available.

Mr. Butterfill: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he has been most generous in doing so. Does he accept that the principle of subsidiarity is important, and, if so, does he accept that a directive such as this should be introduced only if there is serious distortion of competition arising out of it that needs to be corrected? Does he also accept that the Commission has given no evidence that there is any such distortion?

Mr. Lloyd: While we understand the concept of subsidiarity, and in some circumstances would accept it as a rationale for national decision making, the Opposition accept the social charter as a necessary parallel to the single market process. We not only believe that the charter is social justice, but demand that employees should be given social conditions comparable to the best in Europe. That is important, and because of the Government's failure to do anything to protect the employment rights and conditions of part-time workers, we insist that the Community brings in these directives to do so instead. That does not violate the principle of subsidiarity, but rightly means that, where a Government fail to behave acceptably, the Commission has an obligation to protect the people of the country.

The Minister did not address the downside of part-time work. While national and local skill shortages and demographic change may lead to employers needing to offer flexible employment, the Opposition are not content to rely on those factors as the guarantor of acceptable working conditions for millions of lower paid, part-time workers, the majority of whom are women.

More than four in five part-time workers are low-paid on any normal definition of that term. We are not prepared to accept the lack of training opportunities for the low-paid. This country and Ireland alone in the Community have legal systems that actively discriminate against part-time and temporary workers, allowing their employment conditions to be worse than those of people in full-time work. The Opposition find that morally objectionable and economically unjustifiable.

I am conscious of the challenge put to me by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman). The existence of legal discrimination against part-time workers is tantamount to indirect discrimination against women, and runs contrary to article 119 of the treaty. No one looks to the present Government to do anything practical about those problems. We welcome the decision made by the courts in the Bilka-Kaufhas case, which made it clear that less favourable pensions for part-time workers ran contrary to article 119 and effectively amounted to unlawful discrimination against women. I want to place on record our strong support for the recent decision by the Equal Opportunities Commission to take the Government to court on the issue of indirect discrimination against

[Mr. Lloyd]

part-time workers who work too few hours to qualify for protection against unfair dismissal, and who lose out on redundancy compensation.

We applaud the EOC's decision, but will the Minister quash once and for all the rumour that the Government intend to extract a penalty from the EOC for its temerity in taking them to court? It is important that the Minister should place it on record that there will be no retribution.

There is no doubt that our legislation directly discriminates against women, and as such it has no role in the kind of society that we want to build, although it is entirely consistent with the policies of a Government who have abandoned any pretence of making available adequate child care provision and the concept of allowing women to go back to work.

The Minister cited his own study. I propose to quote from the EOC's study:

"The two disincentives to women working longer hours, or in some cases going out to work at all, are the lack of affordable quality child care while children are young and the absence of attractive employment prospects."

The provision of adequate child care is in the Government's hands; they do nothing about it and therefore condemn many women to part-time work. The lack of acceptable work for women is central to the part of the directive dealing with training.

Will the Minister explain why the Government oppose —or have made no positive noises about—that part of directive 100 which would give part-time workers access to training on an equivalent basis to full-time workers? Without that, he knows that he condemns many women to continue in part-time work when they would benefit from the training that would allow them to move into a different kind of employment when their circumstances allow it.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman is discussing part-time workers, the way in which Britain goes about things and the opposition to the directives. He says that we are discriminating against women in some way. That is complete and utter piffle. Only 6 per cent. of women in part-time work in Britain are in part-time work because they cannot find full-time work. More than nine in 10 are in part-time work because that is what they want and because part-time working fits in with their other responsibilities, such as looking after their families.

We have a good record in the European Community when it comes to providing part-time jobs in the marketplace. How can the hon. Gentleman seriously allege that, in standing up to the Commission on the directives, we are acting against women's interests, given that we merely seek to protect part-time jobs which more than 94 per cent. of part-time women workers want?

Mr. Lloyd: That was an inordinately long intervention. The Government survey is nonsense. Those 94 per cent. of women do not seek part-time work: they work part-time because in many cases child care facilities are not available to enable them to work longer hours. The hon. Gentleman has little experience of these matters. I invite him to come and talk to many women—my wife is an example— *[Laughter.]* I am amazed that the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), should find it a source of mirth that the spouse of an hon. Member should be denied access to better working conditions because of inadequate child care facilities.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): May I suggest that the hon. Gentleman shuts up and sits down, and allows somebody on the Conservative Benches to put the case better?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Lady is never shy to put forward the virtues of her arguments. If she will allow me, I shall make my case in my own way. I shall listen with interest to what she has to say when she makes her speech.

There is discrimination against women in the workplace because of the discriminatory nature of legislation. It is important to contrast the position in Britain with that in other countries. The Minister made great play with the position elsewhere and mentioned that there is a higher proportion of people in part-time work in the Netherlands and in Denmark than there is in Britain. They have greater regulation—*[Interruption.]* The Minister disagrees. Can he give any examples of comparable discriminatory legislation against part-time workers in those countries? Such legislation does not exist in those countries, but it certainly exists in Britain.

I know that Sweden is not a member of the EEC, and as such will not be bound by the directives, but it already has conditions that apply to part-time workers that are more stringent than those that would apply under these directives, but it found that there was no diminution in part-time work.

France is probably a better example. In 1982, it introduced provisions that are much tighter than those contained in the directives. Between 1983 and 1988—a period that the Government often use as a basis for jobs growth—the increase of part-time work in Britain was about 26 per cent., but in France it was 36·6 per cent. Despite all the onerous regulations on part-time work in France, there was a much greater increase than in Britain —*[Interruption.]* The figures are in front of hon. Members, and it is for them to draw the interpretation from them that I draw.

There has been a greater growth in the proportion of part-time work in France than in Britain, despite the Minister's claim that regulations would destroy jobs. There is no evidence for that. I have read the methodology of the Department of Employment; the Minister should be ashamed to pray that in aid, because it is a shoddy piece of work.

Even if the figure of £1 billion that the Minister said would be the cost of the directives was accurate, is not that a little less than the costs imposed on business through the uniform business rate? Can the Minister draw any conclusions about the relative impact of the two? Will the cost of the uniform business rate destroy jobs in the way that the Minister claims the cost of the directives will do? If cost is central, the Government have already cost business more by the one move to the unified business rate than the directives will cost.

The Minister spoke about removing barriers, but that is a myth that the Government have perpetuated for many years. It is nonsense to say that the so-called barriers would act as a disincentive to employment. Survey after survey shows that only a small proportion of employers are deterred from employing people because of onerous employment rights.

According to a survey undertaken by Wood and Smith in 1988 for the Department of Employment, less than 1 per cent. of employers gave as a reason for employing

part-timers the fact that they have fewer rights under employment protection law. The idea that a lack of employment rights is an incentive to employ is nonsense.

Three quarters of employers said that they used part-time workers to carry out tasks that are done for a limited number of hours, 30 per cent. to match staffing levels to peaks in demand, 33 per cent. because applicants wanted part-time work and 21 per cent. in order to keep staff who no longer wished to work full-time. There was no suggestion that removing the barriers would, as the Government claim, have any real effect on the location of employment.

Mr. Butterfill: Is not the hon. Gentleman saying that, because grass is green, everything that is green is grass? What he is saying is a non sequitur. If he is saying that employers do not choose to employ part-time workers because they cost less, that does not mean that they choose them for that reason. It does not mean that they would not be deterred if there were these impositions. He is surely putting the matter the wrong way round.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman has to understand that the position cannot be tested and I cannot give empirical evidence of what would happen were the directive in force, because the situation has not arisen. I have given examples of what happens in other countries and the view of employers, and that is as far as I can go. The hon. Gentleman can speculate, and his ideology insists that he speculate in a particular direction. All I can say is that the evidence does not support the views that he puts forward.

The same arguments have been put forward in the past, when other social legislation affecting employment terms and conditions has been introduced. I can remember Conservative Members arguing that equal pay would lead to lack of work for women. It did not. We saw a growth of employment for women in the period that followed. Whenever social legislation offers protection to workers, the Conservative party says that it will destroy jobs. It does not in Europe and it does not in Britain, but hon. Members want to believe it, because it fits in with their ideology and with the myth that protecting people at work harms jobs. It gives their economic and social arguments a veneer of respectability.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Is the hon. Gentleman denying the proposition that an increase in the price of anything reduces demand for it—a proposition which applies equally to labour as to any other commodity? If he is denying that, he is altering the basic rules of economics, as well as, I am afraid, denying the rules of common sense.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman has a weak understanding of economics, because there is something called derived demand and if he consults elementary text books he will discover that that can account for exactly that situation. The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if, rather than engaging in a debate about elementary economics, I press on with the more important matter of the directives.

It is significant that the Minister talked hardly at all about specifics. He said nothing about the Government's insistence on denying part-time workers access to training. That beggars belief, given the Government's claimed commitment to high quality training. The Opposition do not believe their claims, and we are reinforced in our lack of belief by the Government's action on the directive.

Do the Government still believe the nonsense peddled some time ago in the press that people on high incomes working fewer than eight hours would automatically be exempt from national insurance contributions as a result of one of the directives? It is important that the Minister should face up to the truth rather than continue to peddle that nonsense.

The Government's approach is dangerous, because, if the Minister is right, those on low pay could find themselves in difficulty. Lawyers would need to resolve the matter, but I can understand why the Minister argues as he does. But rather than risking a situation in which the French and Germans, having resolved their difficulties, accepted the directive and thus the situation that the Minister claims he is trying to defend us from, surely he would be better to negotiate seriously and not simply try to disrupt the whole basis on which the Commission and the Council of Ministers are proceeding—a much more important debate than the one in which the Minister wishes to engage. We should be in there; a Labour Government would be in there.

Mr. Forth: Can the hon. Gentleman explain this term that his party is so fond of using and abusing—"in there negotiating"? Officials from my Department spend days and days each month negotiating, and my fellow Ministers and I spend hours and hours, days and days, negotiating in the Council of Ministers. Where does the hon. Gentleman get the impression that all the Departments of Her Majesty's Government are not "in there negotiating" in the European Community?

Mr. Lloyd: I will tell the Minister precisely what I mean by that term. It comes up when Ministers make their frequent comments in the press—for example, when the now departed Secretary of State said that the Government would launch a crusade against the social charter, sounding like a latter-day Richard Coeur de Lion; when the Secretary of State told the press earlier this year, when the proposals were first drafted, that the Government intended to oppose them fundamentally; even when the Minister left the Council of Ministers meeting a couple of weeks ago and said that he felt that some long and tough negotiations would take place. It came up when the Minister told the TUC not so long ago that the Government were not prepared to accept anything in the first two directives, and would accept only a little in the third.

That is why we believe that the Government are not negotiating, and have no intention of giving part-time workers decent working conditions. That is why the Opposition disagree fundamentally with their position. We should be in there negotiating: we should be protecting the interests of part-time workers, and, where there is a legitimate national interest to defend, we should be defending it. What we should not be doing is what the Government are doing. They are using their own internal war as a justification for a war in Europe, and using divisions within the party as a reason to continue to play the European card to promote dissension—although, in so doing, they jeopardise that legitimate national interest, and the interests of workers.

[Mr. Lloyd]

In general, the Opposition welcome the directives—although parts of them should be subject to negotiation—and will do what we can, certainly when we are in government, to pursue them unilaterally if needs be.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I fear that we are suffering the effects of a conspiracy of elongated boredom on the part of the two Front Benches. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) has now bored the House for 28 minutes, with much less excuse than my hon. Friend the Minister, who had the Government's point of view to present—and he took 24 minutes.

In a 90-minute debate, with many distinguished former Ministers, Back Benchers and other hon. Members on both sides of the House wishing to contribute, this really is a disgrace. It is yet another example of how the procedures of the House simply cannot work in 90-minute debates that take place late at night.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. It is true that the debate must end at 11.45 pm. I have the strong impression that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) is approaching the conclusion of his speech.

Mr. Lloyd: I was, Mr. Deputy Speaker; but let me remind the House that I will make my own speech in my own time, on behalf of the Opposition.

I agree with the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) on one point: it is ridiculous that a Minister should return from a Council of Ministers meeting, and we should have a debate after that. Nevertheless, I am not prepared to fail to make the Opposition's case—and, more important, that of the people of this country—for the sake of those whom my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) rightly describes as the "Bruges loonies" on the Conservative Benches.

This issue is far too important for us to let the Minister pursue his own ideological fantasies. People expect better of the Government, but they will not get it. They therefore look to the European Community to bring in the directives, and they will have the Opposition's support.

11.10 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I am not very happy about the wording of the motion. If we had tabled a motion to take note, or a motion that supported our Ministers in active negotiations to achieve whatever is best for the work force of this country, I should have felt very much happier. The wording of the motion is somewhat dismissive of part-time workers, the majority of whom, as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said, are women.

The economics are probably wrong. Jobs in this country will not disappear in the 1990s. On the contrary, the demographic time bomb to which the Department of Employment drew our attention means that we shall be short of recruits in the 1990s. We shall not be short of jobs. Much of what has been said by the Minister flies in the face of all our efforts during the last 11 years to improve pensions and to ensure that people make an investment in their own future, with businesses being encouraged to help them to do so. It will cost us a lot more money if we do not pick up the point about pensions for part-time workers.

The Government are right to emphasise that the overall package is far too expensive and that to impose it on every business would be a mistake. To impose it overnight on business would also cause great problems. I shall restrict my remarks, therefore, to pensions for part-time workers.

The politics are wrong. If we asked women part-time workers whether they would like to have pensions as part of their part-time work, pro rata with their salaries, I think that they would be thrilled to bits. It is already good practice in this country; it is the policy of the very best employers and the practice is increasing year by year.

Who are we talking about? In 1989, 72 per cent. of all women of working age had paid jobs of one kind or another and 29 per cent. of them were part time. It is complacent nonsense to suggest that the reason they are part time is that they all passionately want to be part time. The reason that they are part time is that they are looking after children. In many ways that has to be in the public interest. It is certainly the policy on this side of the House that women should have such a choice. Twenty-nine per cent. of women with children under five are working part time; 49 per cent. of those with children between the ages of five and nine are working part time; 43 per cent. of those with children between the ages of 10 and 16 are working part time; but only 22 per cent. are working part time once their children reach the age of 16. Then they switch to full-time work. By that stage we are close to having eight out of 10 women in this country in paid work. Therefore, we are referring to millions upon millions of women for whom the preference for part time work is a matter of having no choice. We want them to be part time and we want to encourage them to do part-time work.

Even those women who are in full-time work in this country enjoy far fewer benefits, particularly with regard to pensions. The OPCS monitor of the general household survey for 1989, published on 30 October, showed that 80 per cent. of male full-time workers are in a pension scheme, whereas only 66 per cent. of female full-time workers are in a pension scheme. We do not yet have the 1989 figures for part-time workers in pension schemes, but they are mostly women and most of them do not stand a whisker's chance of being in a pension scheme unless they are employed by one of the most thoughtful and enlightened employers.

Let me pursue the question about loss of jobs. The Department of Employment says that by the end of the 1990s there will be 1 million new jobs. Conditions in the 1990s will not be the same as those that we experienced in the 1980s. There was a glut of young people in the 1980s. We had to find 1 million additional jobs just to keep unemployment below the 3 million mark. That will not happen now. The Department of Employment's own figures show that the number of 16 to 19-year-olds coming into the jobs market during the next few years will drop by 23 per cent. By the end of the century the number of people of working age under the age of 25 will have dropped from around the 8 million mark, where it is now, to about 6 million. So 2 million people will simply disappear. The Department of Employment has been hammering away, trying to persuade employers to take this fact on board and to be realistic about it.

What that will mean is more women workers. Again, the Department of Employment has said that, of the 1 million new jobs between now and the end of the century, 90 per cent. will have to go to women because there will be no fellas to do them. In particular, there will be no young

workers to do them. On the one hand, the Department says that 90 per cent. of the new jobs will go to women workers. On the other hand, it says, suddenly, that all those jobs will vanish. Frankly, I doubt it. I do not think that they will vanish. I am not sure that the hon. Member for Stretford made a very good case, but the economics are all there and the figures are all there.

However, my main concern and the reason why I shall not support the Opposition in the Lobby is that an important point of public policy has been completely missed. What do most businesses and working people in this country complain about? The answer is tax. If we add up the amount of tax that the average working man with a family is now paying, including income tax and VAT and all the other bits and bobs, one finds that a higher proportion of his income is taxed now than when this tax-cutting Government came into office in 1979. Most businesses would prefer to pay less corporation tax and less VAT.

It costs us a fortune to assist people who do not have a pension. What is the largest burden on businesses? Tax. What is the largest departmental budget? Social security. What is the largest single item in the social security budget? Pay-as-you-go pensions, and the second largest item is income support. I would like to bet that if the Department of Employment carried out a careful analysis of the social security statistics, it would find that many of those who are claiming income support and who have no contributions towards their pensions are people who worked part time —mostly women—or women whose husbands did not have a pension scheme or whose pension scheme did not have an allowance for survivors.

Three and a quarter million women of pensionable age live alone in this country. They are—they do not wish to be—a considerable burden on the public purse. What bothers me is that if we continue to be so negative about notions of encouraging pensions for part-time workers, that will increase. It is the one budget that will not shrink. In the interests of keeping public expenditure under control and of bearing down on inflation, on which we do not have the best record in Europe, I believe that there is a strong public policy case for looking once more at the question of pensions.

We should begin to require employers to work towards having a decent pension scheme for every employee. That should be done gradually, over a long period. We could exempt smaller businesses, as we do from many other burdens, and ensure that the costs were kept under control for them. The pension should be pro rata to the employee's salary, as is the case in Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury and many other businesses. The costs should be shared between the worker, the employer and the Government —in the sense of tax relief, which is how we could encourage the development of the pension scheme.

That would mean that in years to come fewer people would be dependent on the pay-as-you-go pension, fewer people would need to draw social security and there would be more people proudly having invested in their own pensions with the encouragement and the contributions of their employers. That fits mightily with everything that this Government have tried to do since 1979.

11.17 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): Early in his speech the Minister quoted figures relating to our colleagues in the European Community and the directives that they had implemented. That was a weak argument with which to begin, because surely the purpose of the European Community is to encourage good practices across all the countries in the Community. We and other countries should be setting an example. To compare this country with those that do nothing is a very poor argument.

The Minister then quoted only the employers and said that they were not in favour of the directives. He gave us a whole string of reasons for that, but his quotations seemed selective. Is he aware that the Confederation of British Industry gave evidence stating that

"cost savings are not significant factors on most employers' decisions to employ part-time staff"?

It is interesting that the Minister chose to ignore that evidence from the CBI and did not share it with us, while trying to convince us that all employers are against the directives.

Perhaps I can help the Minister a little more. If he had done some further reading, he would have found that a Department of Employment report on "Labour Use Strategies" concluded:

"The main reasons given for using part-time staff were to carry out tasks that only need to be done for a limited number of hours a day or to meet peaks in demand".

If the Minister had looked further, he would have found even more compelling reasons to move from the policies that he has advanced. He quoted some companies, but is he aware of the practices of that great company, Marks and Spencer, which has equal rights for its part-time workers across a variety of personnel practices? I wonder whether he is aware of the policy of the Halifax building society which offers equal rights for all employees. If the Minister took evidence from all employers, he would conclude that the views which he put to the House are not complete.

I suspect that the Minister's views are more concerned with supporting Government policy on a variety of matters. I do not believe for one moment that he is trying to be fair and just to people in terms of employment. When he looks at the Government's training policy, he might like to consider why their employment training programme discriminates against part-time training. Why is there legislation that states that a person who moves to employee status has to continue to work for 30 hours a week to get the training allowances? That is interesting, coming from a Government who believe that part-time work and part-time training are valuable.

The pressures of Government policy on local authorities have led to a reduction in the pay and conditions of part-time staff. Supply teachers employed by my local education authority are no longer paid pro rata or enjoy working conditions pro rata. That is a direct result of the Government's policy of curbing local expenditure. Supply teachers are doubly hit—they cannot work during the holidays because schools are not open, so they cannot get allowances.

The Government's policy in requiring local authorities to carry out competitive tendering has led to a reduction in the pay and conditions of part-time staff. In my county of East Sussex, many part-time staff, particularly cleaners, no longer enjoy the pension rights that they enjoyed before the authority was forced to carry out competitive

[Mr. David Bellotti]

tendering. The Minister said that he welcomed the health and safety aspects of the directive. Does he accept that the competitive tendering policies that he is forcing local authorities to undertake put some of those aspects at risk, because people try to rush their work?

Part-time youth workers are discriminated against, but the directives would help them if the Government accepted them warmly. The Government's curbs on local authority spending have led, in local authority after local authority, to a reduction in the pay and conditions of part-time youth and community workers. Those who work for 10 per cent. of a full week do not get 10 per cent. of the pay, benefits, holiday or pension contributions of full-time workers, despite their being equally qualified. If the Minister says that he supports the large numbers of part-time workers, why will he not do more to help part-time youth workers?

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) referred to women. She was right in everything that she said. Part-time women workers are disproportionately affected in terms of working conditions compared with men. Child care provision is perhaps the greatest concern. Not long ago, the Government had the power to do a great deal but did little. Extending the tax relief proposals to cover all women with children in child care would be an enormous help for part-time women workers.

It is a question of what principle the House wants to adopt. We should adopt a fair standard in terms of pay, training, holidays, pensions and health and safety—whether a person works part time or full time. The Government's attitude to non-standard work is to support the small number of mean-minded employers who do not want to meet the costs that they should meet. The Labour amendment does not go far enough, but we will support it. There is much for the Minister to answer, and I hope that he will address some of the issues which I raised.

11.25 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I declare an interest that is directed more to knowledge than to pecuniary advantage. I was an employment agent in Yorkshire for more than 10 years and I still own a technical employment agency, although it is not active.

It is always surprising to hear hon. Members say how much they support an EC directive or draft directive. They do not say that EC directives have changed enormously since the Labour and Liberal parties rushed forward to say that the social charter was a wonderful idea. They seem to think, or suggest, that the EC directives of today are the same as those which came before us years ago. It was clear from the earlier directives that the European Community was against part-time and temporary work. It is now saying, however, that those employment relationships cannot be called into question in any circumstances. Over two decades, the Commission has produced documentation in which it has attempted to persuade us that part-time and temporary work is damaging and needs to be brushed away. It has suggested that regulations should be introduced to stop people being part-time or temporary employees for a long period.

I was surprised to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) had to say about part-time employees. Any private employment agency will say that the relationship between part-time or temporary work and employers is such that an employer will prefer to take on permanent staff. In general, an employer will prefer to take on full-time staff rather than part-time staff. Unless that is understood, the relevant arguments will be turned on their head. It is necessary almost to persuade employers that there is some market advantage in giving part-time workers full rein and allowing them to do what they want in their employment.

The average employment agency will have filing cabinets full of details of people who want part-time work. The women among them are not saying, "If I could get child care for my children for this number of hours or that number, I would do full-time work." In general, women who have young children try to ensure that they are with their children for as long as possible. Against that background, they try to find part-time work.

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend is right, but if employers want full-time workers and they appoint part-time workers, they do so because those are the only workers they can get. That does not rule out an obligation on both sides to ensure that, when part-time workers end their working lives, they are entitled to some sort of pension.

Mr. Bruce: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but I believe that this is the wrong debate in which to advance the views that she has outlined. I do not think that she believes that the EC should frame a set of directives to ensure that all employees should have equal conditions.

I give an extreme example. Let us suppose that an employment agency is telephoned on a Monday and told, "My employee has not turned up for work and I want a part-time or temporary employee." Let us suppose also that the employer wants especially a temporary employee. The documents are aimed at ensuring that the person who is told to rush to Smith Brothers because someone has not turned up for work is paid the same wages as the comparable staff in the organisation, has had the same training, is a member of the same pension scheme and is entitled to the same national insurance.

The market determines that the people that employment agencies send to employers to fill gaps are paid more money than full-time employees, especially in London. In other areas, where perhaps there are plenty of people available to do the work, temporary employees will be paid less money than full-time employees. The employer who takes in a temporary employee from an agency will almost always pay more money per hour for him or her than he would normally pay his own employee to do the same work. The relationship is complex. To suggest that everyone must have the same conditions is nonsense.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman clear from his mind for a moment his hostile feelings towards the Community in general and concentrate on the principle? Is he saying that in some parts of Britain, because there is a surplus of available part-time labour, employers should get away with paying less than the rate per hour that they would have to pay full-time workers? Does he agree that that would be a great injustice to those workers, who are mostly women, who have to work part time because of other responsibilities?

Mr. Bruce: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has never been in the real world. In the real world, people earn money on the basis of the demand for their particular skills. That happens in every job—except perhaps being a

Member of Parliament, as hon. Members seem to get paid the same amount of money whether or not they have any knowledge of a subject. We are all paid the same.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No; I have answered the hon. Lady's point.

Some points were made earlier about trade union hostility. There is indeed a great deal of such hostility to temporary employees. I am certain that that stems from the fact that trade unions do not like the thought of temporary employees not paying trade union dues. I have evidence to support that. The Manpower organisation found an easy way of ensuring that it had no bother from the trade unions when it supplied drivers to certain companies. Manpower had an agreement with the area office of the trade union involved that the company would collect the equivalent in trade union dues for every day that someone worked and ship it off to the trade union. The union got its money, although it did not know who the heck was supposed to be part of its membership. The union told the company that it could enter any of the union's closed shop areas because it was collecting union dues.

With regard to health and safety, it is right that people should have the same safety conditions whether or not they are employed on a part-time or temporary basis. We must ensure that the conditions are reasonable, because some earlier draft legislation tended to suggest that a temporary employee might have to be given one or two weeks' worth of safety training before he or she was allowed to start work. I believe that temporary employees tend to be placed in the least hazardous jobs and in those that do not require as much training. Clearly that is best for a worker who has been taken on for only a short period. I will support the Government in the Lobby.

11.32 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I was surprised to hear the Minister decry the consultation efforts of our opposite numbers in the Community. He recently admitted in a letter to me that, when consulting British organisations about maternity rates, he had not thought to consult—of all people—the Royal College of Midwives, and nor had he consulted a large number of women's organisations. He does of course consult employers, and he then presents their views as the consensus of British opinion.

The Minister compounded the offence by quoting a poll of the opinions of women in Britain, saying that only 6 per cent. want to work full time. That is hardly surprising when we consider that, by 1991, there will be more than 9 million people over 65 in the United Kingdom and 11 million children under 14. That amounts to more than 20 million people. When we consider that the responsibility for caring for the elderly and for young children lies mostly with women, then of course they will want to look for part-time work—if they feel able to look for work at all.

We must ask women what they would like for their life style if child care were provided. With the exception of Ireland, Britain has the worst record of child care among EC countries. If we did not have the disgraceful state of community care in this country, many more women would welcome the chance to work full time. The Government are bandying nonsensical figures about and taking no account of women's wishes; they are using their hostility to the EC as an excuse for permitting some unscrupulous employers to get away with paying part time women workers disgracefully low pay.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does my hon. Friend agree that, whether or not women want to work full time or part time, they should have equal conditions and not be exploited? Is she familar with the Department of Employment's statement that acknowledges that part timers and temporary workers are treated worse and states that that is the price that women are prepared to pay? Women are not asked whether they are prepared to pay that price. They should have the right to decent conditions, whether they work full time or part time.

Mrs. Fyfe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pay tribute to her great record of work on behalf of working women, in particular low-paid, part time working women. Many thousands of working women in this country work for disgracefully low rates. The bunch opposite argue that employers should get the benefit because that is what the market demands. An hon. Member said that the dearer a commodity is the harder it is to sell it. That kind of thinking sent seven-year-olds into the mills during the last century, and there is absolutely no excuse for it.

I have still to hear why Conservative Members think that it is acceptable to pay part-time workers lower rates of pay and put them in worse conditions than those in full-time jobs. All their criticisms of EC regulations do not justify their views. If any Conservative Member would like to interrupt me to explain why he thinks that a part-time worker should have less pay per hour or worse working conditions, I should be glad to hear from him. No Conservative Member is rising to his feet to intervene. The debate is about letting greedy and selfish employers get away with it.

11.37 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Many of the points that I wanted to make have already been excellently made by my hon. Friend the Minister, but certain factors need to be brought to the attention of the House, not least the hollowness of the Opposition's amendment. It specifically states that many people, including a high percentage of women workers, rely on part-time work in the absence of full-time employment. The Opposition have produced no evidence to justify that statement, which is the meat of their amendment. My hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that all the evidence is exactly the opposite. Not only the labour force survey but the Select Committee on Employment, on which I served until a year ago, have made it abundantly clear that there is no evidence that any more than a tiny proportion of part-time workers have any ambition to do anything other than part-time work. That destroys the Opposition's amendment.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) stressed that a number of businesses are now providing good terms for their part-time workers—equivalent or even better than those for their full-time workers. They are providing the pensions that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) mentioned, and all the perks that workers want. However, the hon. Gentleman failed to recognise that they are voluntarily providing them. Those business are able to assess, first, whether it is

[Mr. James Paice]

necessary to provide such terms to recruit part-time staff and, secondly, whether they are in a position to provide those opportunities.

The important thing that one must understand—it goes over the Opposition's head no matter how many times we say it—is that any business can pay its work force only that which it can afford. If it cannot afford to pay, the result may be a smaller work force, if one at all.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Paice: I know that the Minister wants to respond to the debate, so my hon. Friend must forgive me for not giving way.

I agree with the Minister that the directives would affect the availability of jobs. In my constituency, in common with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), many people are involved in field-scale vegetable production. Large arable farms employ hundreds, and in one case thousands, of people for seasonal, casual work. That work attracts people from all over the country.

Recently we concluded lengthy negotiations with the Inland Revenue about oppressive regulations that it wanted to impose on employers in relation to the employment of part-time workers. Those negotiations forced the representatives of the pre-packing and processed vegetable industry to examine all aspects of the employment of their work force. They discovered that they were reliant on their freedom to meet the market for labour and for their produce. If extra restrictions had been imposed, thousands of jobs would have been lost. That would have been a disaster for my constituents who rely on such work, particularly in the summer when they are happy to be outside.

It would be equally disastrous if the directives went through unamended. I support the Government's stand.

11.41 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your ruling about the possible violation of Standing Order No. 14, which states: "if Mr. Speaker shall be of the opinion that, because of the importance of the subject matter of the motion, the time for debate has not been adequate, he shall, instead of putting the question as aforesaid, interrupt the business, and the debate shall stand adjourned till the next sitting".

In support of my case, I cite the fact that the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), took up no less than 30 minutes of the debate. That represented one third of the time allocated. I believe that it was Disraeli who said of Gladstone that he was "inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Tonight, the hon. Member for Stretford anaesthetised the House with his own boredom. It was an amazing performance given the short time allocated.

Even my hon. Friend the Minister is not entirely without blame as he took 24 minutes. I admit that there were many interruptions in his speech and he had to deploy the Government's case, so I cheerfully acquit him. Nevertheless, we need a voice from the Chair to stop such abuse of our procedures, which destroys the ability of Back-Bench Members to contribute. Many of my hon. Friends either walked out because they were unable to speak or they truncated their remarks to an unreasonable degree. Debates late at night cannot go on like this if the Front-Bench spokesmen take up such a large percentage of the time allocated for the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and he has put it on the record. I must inform him and the House that I am not prepared, in all the circumstances, to adjourn the debate under Standing Order No. 14(1)(b).

11.43 pm

Mr. Forth: I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and to the House for the length of my opening speech. I wanted to set out the Government's case, and this was the first opportunity that we had to do it. I also took nearly all the interventions that were made.

In the brief time left, I want to answer my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who left the Chamber because he was dissatisfied by my failure to answer him, although I thought that I had. My officials wrote me this answer, so it is pukka. We do not accept that article 100A is the correct legal basis and we have made our views known to the Commission and other member states, some of which share our view. These matters should be dealt with on the basis of unanimity. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend.

The debate has been about deciding between imposition and choice—about deciding whether we shall have a certain policy imposed on us by the Community or whether we shall leave the choice to employers. If, as a result of these measures, we risk ending up with fewer jobs and fewer part-time jobs, especially for women——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), to put the Questions necessary to dispose of them.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 112, Noes 153.

Division No. 28] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Adams, Mrs. Katherine	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Allen, Graham	Dixon, Don
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Flynn, Paul
Barron, Kevin	Foster, Derek
Beith, A. J.	Foulkes, George
Bell, Stuart	Fyfe, Maria
Bellotti, David	George, Bruce
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Benton, Joseph	Harman, Ms Harriet
Bermingham, Gerald	Hinchliffe, David
Bradley, Keith	Hood, Jimmy
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Howells, Geraint
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Caborn, Richard	Hoyle, Doug
Callaghan, Jim	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Illsley, Eric
Clay, Bob	Ingram, Adam
Clelland, David	Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Cohen, Harry	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Cousins, Jim	Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Cox, Tom	Kirkwood, Archy
Cryer, Bob	Lamond, James

Leadbitter, Ted
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Warren, Kenneth
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Neil Hamilton and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8072/90 and 9601/90 on non-standard work; and endorses the Government's view that, in the light of the 1·6 million new part-time jobs created in the United Kingdom since March 1983 and the overwhelming preference of part-time workers for part-time rather than full-time work, the Government should not accept proposals which would greatly increase the cost of employing part-time and temporary workers and would significantly reduce the number of jobs, thereby damaging the competitiveness of our industry, and that of the European Community.

11.55 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Following on the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), it should be put on record that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), fairly and courteously, gave way many times in his speech. I hope that my hon. Friend's point of order will be interpreted as a stricture on the time limits imposed on the debate rather than on the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is not a point of order, but the hon. Gentleman has got his point on the record.

Information Technology

11.56 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6864/90 on a Research and Development programme on Information Technology; and endorses the Government's view that Community support for research in this area should be given a high priority.

The Commission's proposal for the new IT research programme was published on 1 June 1990 as document 6894/90. The DTI submitted an explanatory memorandum on the proposal on 28 June. The Select Committee on European Legislation has reported on these documents. I am speaking on behalf of my noble Friend the Minister for Industry and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, who is in Brussels on Government business tonight.

Further research and development into information technology will be the largest single element of the third framework programme. It will provide around £200 million a year of support for IT research which will be carried out by industry, research organisations and higher education institutions. The new programme will have three main objectives—first, to strengthen the scientific and technological basis of the IT industry; secondly, to promote collaboration between companies and the higher education institutions across the EC; and, thirdly, to promote research leading to the development of international standards—an excellent area for Community activity.

A good deal of technology has been developed under ESPRIT—the European strategic programme for research and development in information technology—I and II. This should be available to users. The new programme will devote more effort to technology transfer. In principle, the United Kingdom Government welcome this. We shall be working closely with the Commission to ensure that United Kingdom users of IT can benefit from these new Community initiatives. We are pressing the Commission hard to place more emphasis on research that meets the needs of users rather than just being driven by the technology. We want to ensure that clear priorities for the new programme are established; and that it is properly co-ordinated with research activities in related sectors.

The Government want a strong management committee, with the member states actively involved. We wish to modify a proposal for the special procedure that will allow the Commission to give grants outside the normal competition for proposals. We are critical of the idea and seek transparent procedures and opportunities for all comers to tender.

The United Kingdom Government are participating in the debate on priorities under the budget. We are broadly content with the Commission proposals, but would prefer to see more emphasis on software and business applications, avoiding an over-emphasis on silicon micro electronics. We also wish to see more smaller companies benefiting from the programme.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the European Community's initiative be targeted through the regional development fund or will it be pan-European, without particular emphasis on the special assisted areas?

Mr. Redwood: It is a programme for the IT industry throughout the European Community, run under its own procedures laid down in the document before the House and intended to assist collaborative projects with more than one company from more than one member state involved in the partnership.

In the past, the ESPRIT programme have provided opportunities for United Kingdom firms. United Kingdom organisations are involved in nearly 70 per cent. of the successful proposals—a high figure compared with that in other countries. Overall, 230 United Kingdom organisations have taken part in a total of 416 ESPRIT projects. The Government have every expectation that the United Kingdom will continue to be a strong and effective participant. We will press home our concerns in the negotiations. I commend the motion to the House.

12.2 am

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): We are discussing one of the most important research fields in the world t. lay. It is no exaggeration to say that it is, above all, on the future development of infomatics that the success or failure of EEC manufacturing industry next decade depends.

The Opposition welcome the commitment of 1,352 million ecu to the programme of collaborative research over the next five years. I might say in passing, however, that that is only a small fraction of the amount that IBM is likely to be spending over the same period. It is important to put the matter into perspective.

It is my duty to question the capacity of British industry to benefit from the framework II programme, given the difficulties that have arisen over the past few years and the Government's apparent inability—exemplified by the hands-off attitude of the Department of Trade and Industry—to realise that such programmes can be only a small part of the national effort that we require.

Let me refer to some of the problems that have beset our industry in the past few years. First, and perhaps most significant, is the recent takeover of ICL by Fujitsu, which effectively spelt the end of our indigenous control of our mainframe computer manufacturing industry. I welcome wholeheartedly the commitment by Fujitsu to continue research and development and manufacture in this country and wish ICL well under the new regime.

I regret, however, that such a takeover had to happen. Can we really stand here with our hands on our hearts and say that it could not and should not have been prevented? Sadly, the short-term attitude prevalent in British business, the lack of available funds for long-term investment and the hostility of successive DTI Ministers to any suggestion of a Government role probably made it inevitable.

A similar pattern can be seen in the loss of the transputer development, with INMOS now in foreign hands. It can be seen in the failure to follow up the undoubted benefits that should have accrued from the Alvey programme. It can be seen in the take-up by Japanese firms of the flat screen technology developed by United Kingdom companies. There is an endless list of missed opportunities, gleefully seized on by our competitors abroad.

There have also been successes and it is important to refer to them in order to put the matter into perspective. IBM maintains hugely successful operations in Britain, as

do Hewlett Packard, Digital Systems, Motorola and other foreign companies. But the major worldwide benefits of their success accrue to their own centres of operations in their own countries. Certainly, with Amstrad assembling its highly successful laptops and personal computers here —in my constituency, as it happens—we can draw some satisfaction. But the technology comes from the United States and almost none of the components used in the machines bear a "made in Britain" tag. Even in the production of software, in which we have long held the dominant position in Europe, people abroad are seeking to acquire the skills, which they are capable of developing themselves, by taking over British companies, as happened to Hoskyns earlier this year.

Are we then to welcome a programme from which few truly British companies will benefit? Where is the necessary Government action to underpin our attempts to ensure that they do?

Some general points are worth mentioning. The level of expenditure in Britain on civil research and development is far below that of our competitors. This programme, welcome though it is, is no substitute for that. We suffer from a crippling shortage of science and engineering graduates and, specific to the information technology industry, from a shortage of computer programmers. We also suffer from the ingrained prejudice that rewards and treats the skills of those groups as second class.

The level of skills training in Britain is woefully inadequate and far below that of our competitors—yet the Government have pushed through further cuts this year in the budget for that key area. The level of Government support for industry is a bit of a joke. They are so concerned with avoiding any suggestion of partiality that they have managed to ensure that on the so-called level playing field of Europe Britain is the only side to play without a goalkeeper.

How can we benefit from this imaginative programme of research? Each of the five areas of the programme is vital to the future of the industry. On microelectronics, I agree with the Minister that the programme will be of less benefit to United Kingdom manufacturers and research departments than to those in Europe. The withdrawal of Philips from involvement in semi-conductor manufacture is disappointing and, perhaps, a gloomy prognosis for the future.

Information processing systems and software, which increase the effectiveness of the computers that we use, are also important. Although it is not explicitly stated in the document that we are discussing, the development of the new safety-critical packages is important. They are now often required to run the complex systems that influence our daily lives. I should welcome some comment from the Minister on the Government's attitude to that.

The advanced business and home systems point to an exciting future when they are developed. The computerised manufacturing, design and research programmes could all benefit from collaborative research. They are all vital to our future prosperity. I suspect that, as with previous programmes, British-based programmes and research departments will secure a reasonable share of the available funds, probably slightly in excess of what we might expect based on the proportion of the research carried out. We are effective in taking up EEC money. We have to be, because there is not much available from any other source. I trust that the Minister will tonight give further reassurance about collaborative research, and in particular that ICL will suffer no disadvantage because of its takeover when tendering. I hope that the Department will be vigilant in ensuring that other European companies will not be allowed to do what they have threatened and freeze out ICL from collaborative research projects.

It remains to be seen whether we shall secure any lasting benefit from our research efforts. Given the dismal track record of the Government and the indifference of Ministers to the problem, I fear that the Department may prove to be a burden too great for industry to bear, and that, while we may secure the short-term benefits of the research fund, there will be no long-term benefit to jobs and products.

12.8 am

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I wish first to declare an interest as I have been involved in the computer industry for many years. Unfortunately, that interest has never led me successfully to obtain any money from any of the programmes, so perhaps I can speak objectively—not that I would not have wished to do so anyway. My experience of watching other people have a go has led me to conclude that people should not have a go unless they have a great deal of money and can afford to bid. The ponderous procedures and the enormous overheads connected with the programmes deny many small businesses the chance of getting any money.

I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister said. I wish to comment on the programmes as they have been and as they will be. I have one minor pedantic comment to make. The document is stated to be about research and technological development. As an engineer, I always wish that people would stop putting research and development together. There should be no development without production, and research is quite different from development. The overhead structures, the method by which one works and the kind of people used are completely different. People who are associated with development should be associated with production. Running research and development together in the same phrase is the old story of people not understanding how industry should work, and how it does work in the better-run companies.

One notices from the explanatory memorandum that some £1·5 billion has been spent, but there is nothing about what has been done with it or the effectiveness of it. Some of that money was spent as far back as 1984-88. There was some £500 million of Community support with probably an equal amount of industrial investment as well. It would be helpful if the Minister, perhaps not tonight, would be so kind as to look at the need to deploy the quality of results that have been achieved so that one can learn from the value of the investment. It worries me that we are charging forward from 1992 onwards with a suggestion of further substantial sums, which might be correct. When I see moneys rounded off to £500 million and £1·25 billion, I think that there has not been enough investigation about the proposals that the Commission has in mind based on its knowledge of the reality of business and investment.

I notice that the explanatory memorandum says that the scope of the instrument is broadened so that co-operation with third countries, including those outside the European Free Trade Association, may be promoted. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) spoke

[Mr. Kenneth Warren]

about ICL and it would be helpful to know whether Fujitsu is allowed to bid directly or whether it has to go through ICL and whether ICL is allowed to bid. The Minister may want to consider that rather than refer to it tonight.

On the policy implications of the investment sums involved, the explanatory memorandum says that there are issues on which there will be further discussions, such as the underlying rationale of priorities of the programme. That is putting the cart before the horse. The rationale of priorities should be identified before sums of money can possibly be talked about. We should vote on the rationale of priorities and then vote on the sums of money.

The explanatory memorandum illustrates once again the kind of problems that one runs up against when one looks at Euro-legislation from Brussels. The document published on 1 June uses the kind of verbiage that cannot be taken seriously. For example, "whereas" appears 12 times. In the articles there is no description of what one will be doing, and eventually one reaches page 12 and a reference to the JESSI programme, which at that time had just about collapsed. What is proposed for two years hence on a programme that has already gone into the sand?

The document goes on to talk about work being addressed

"to the major components of the chain of designing, manufacturing, testing and applying advanced semiconductor products."

Again, we are looking at something some years ahead which, with great respect to these wonderful gentlemen in Brussels, has already been in action in Austin in Texas for the past two years. They should take off their blinkers and look more widely at what is happening in the world of information technology, including communications.

I recognise that my hon. Friend the Minister said that we should concentrate more on software, but it grieves me considerably that there should be no reference to the more advanced types of microelectronics, for example based on gallium arsenide technology.

My hon. Friend is right about software, but we must take the software problem by the throat and shake it. When the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, looked at information technology 18 months ago, we visited Japan and the Japanese gave us a clear understanding that by the year 2000 all the population aged from 20 to 30 in Japan would be engaged on software production. Something is wrong somewhere. I acknowledge that software, as opposed to hardware, is becoming an increasingly large component of any given system, but I nevertheless hope that we can secure what the document originally asked for. We need to introduce some rationale into the proposals rather than just voting money.

It seems that it is only late at night that we debate the important subject of the workings of the European Community and what it should be doing. The debate before this lasted only 90 minutes, more's the pity, but we cannot return to it. As far as I could see, none of the documents—and none of the other documents dealing with science and technology that we have discussed—mentions the needs of users, to which the Minister very properly referred. Those needs must predominate: this must be a market-led business operation or it is nothing.

More attention should be paid to standards and technical norms, which are not given the priority that they deserve. Given the leadership of the market from research stage to production and development stages, we ought to get the prime users in the Community together. I believe that they could instil in the nations and companies participating—and seeking to participate—in the programme the understanding that the Community's main market is the public sector.

Our Government spend some £4 billion a year on hardware and software for the application—civil and military—of information technology, excluding communications. Half that is spent in the civil sector. The Select Committee tried to persuade the Department of Trade and Industry and the excellent Ministers who were there at the time—I am sure that the even better Ministers who are there now will pay attention to this splendid suggestion—that industry could be given a good deal of leadership if the Government saw themselves as a customer. Given the quality of their purchasing, the Government would indeed find themselves leading their industry forward, enabling it to obtain the investment that it should be granted and, as a result, the success that it deserves.

I commend the work that is being done, but I am afraid that the scepticism of experience always shines through.

12.17 am

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) for his comments. We are debating an issue that will come before the Research Council, probably in the early spring of next year; my hon. Friend's comments will be very helpful to my noble Friend Lord Hesketh, the Minister for Industry, who will be negotiating on our behalf. The Government agree that rationale is needed in the proposals and that is what we are injecting into the debate, as I tried to explain at the outset. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that research is different from development. The purpose of this programme is to finance research rather than development.

My hon. Friend raised the crucial issue of effectiveness. This is indeed a vital issue of great concern to the United Kingdom Government. We believe that our proposals will improve the effectiveness of the programmes and will tackle the just elements of the criticisms voiced comparatively recently in, for example, the *Financial Times*. That paper made some points that we feel are reflected in our negotiating position; we do not, however, agree with some of the others.

In the past, such research programmes have eventually produced results in terms of products and market developments, but we should bear it in mind that the programme is in its earliest phase and is not designed to produce products directly. Monolight, a small company that benefited from a previous programme, produced an optical spectrum analyser as a result of initial work.

Can ICL, in the United Kingdom, gain access to the funds? Yes, we are told by the Commission that it is still eligible to enter into collaboration with others and bid for the funds in the usual way. We have made that an important part of our negotiations with the Community. I cannot say how easy it is to form collaborative ventures. That is a matter for private sector companies. However, we regard them as wholly United Kingdom companies, as

they always were, and as full participants. Therefore we shall do all that we can to ensure that they remain full participants.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) referred to the JESSI project. The board has approved 54 projects to date, 26 of which involve the United Kingdom. Those involved find the projects useful. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that leadership can be important when the Government are the customer. We shall bear that in mind when considering our procurement policies.

I am glad that the Opposition acknowledge so many good features. They acknowledge that there are many inward investors. It shows that the policies are working and that we are creating exactly the right climate for information technology and its related areas. What good news it is that IBM intends to add to its massive investment here its worldwide telecommunications headquarters. They are to be here in London. It is a sure sign that our industrial policies, based on liberalisation and trusting the market, are doing well.

We welcome Fujitsu's commitments, as does the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy. I am glad that he acknowledged them.

Dr. Moonie: Will the Minister reflect on our balance of trade with the rest of the world in information technology and how it has progressed during the last few years?

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question. Last year we ran a £900 million surplus in investment technology with the other EC countries. I am sure that he will agree that that is a fine achievement. I am glad that he welcomes the size of the programme. He suggests that we are inactive nationally. That is untrue. We have national programmes, too. The proportion of Government expenditure on research and development is higher than that in Japan and the United States. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that Japan is also successful in this area.

During the summer of 1990 we announced a national research and development programme in safety critical software. We are encouraging industrial and academic collaboration. We have considerable strengths in that area.

Our policies are creating the right climate and background for a very strong industry in this country. I commend the proposals and our negotiating position to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6864/90 on a Research and Development programme on Information Technology; and endorses the Government's view that Community support for research in this area should be given a high priority.

ESTIMATES

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Report [4th December] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees), if the proposals described in the un-numbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 11th December 1990 relating to Total Allowable Catches and Quotas for 1991 and relating to the reciprocal fisheries Agreement between the Community and Norway for 1991 are recommended by the Select Committee on European Legislation for further consideration, the said proposals shall not stand referred to a European Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Independent Living Fund

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

12.22 am

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): It is my privilege and pleasure to speak on behalf of two of my constituents with regard to the independent living fund. That fund has been a victim of its own success. I refer the Minister to the ninth report of the Social Services Committee on community care. I echo what the Select Committee says in paragraphs 62 to 88—that the Government have not fully appreciated the innovation of the independent living fund in giving some disabled people and their families the resources to build up their own care packages. I ask the Minister to endorse what is said in the ninth report by establishing the ILF as an independent body.

Disabled people are now asserting their right to live as equal and independent citizens in the community, but to be independent and equal requires opportunity and resources. Since 1988, the independent living fund has given people the opportunity and the resources to live independently within the community, to participate on an equal basis and to contribute both economically and socially to the life of the community. Not only has the ILF provided the opportunity and resources for independent living; many will also testify to the undoubted fact that the ILF has also secured the preservation of their lives and liberty and has enabled them to gain much happiness, all of which is considered to be essential for a good quality of life.

However, the independent living fund is now doomed to close in 1992. I am armed with a petition signed by 4,000 of my constituents which expresses their deep concern about the future of the ILF. Those 4,000 citizens believe that such moneys to maintain severely disabled people in the community should be given as of right to those who need it under the social security system to ensure uniform provision throughout the United Kingdom.

To date, the Minister and the Government have been deaf to that suggestion, so my constituents decided to arrange this petition and to present it to me after seeing the plight of Jim and Monica Elder Woodward. The main force behind the petition was a lady called Betty Campbell of Dalvait road, Balloch, in my constituency. She was ably assisted by Brenda Newton of Halketh crescent, Alexandria, who was equally determined that these signatures should be presented to Parliament, and that I should do that on their behalf. I have received tremendous support from the workers at factories in my constituency, from the Polaroid factory, from the Vale of Leven district hospital, from the Whisky Bonds, and from post offices and general practitioners' surgeries. The parish priest at the church that Monica Elder Woodward attends has also given his support.

All those people are urging the Minister to reconsider because, without the independent living fund, more than 6,000 people would have to leave their own communities and live in socially isolated residential care at a cost of between £250 and £1,000 per week. The average cost to the ILF of providing help is £72. I quote that figure from the Minister's comments in Committee yesterday. Therefore, even if the Minister disregards the humanitarian case, there is a sound economic case for continuing the ILF. As the Minister said yesterday:

"That is a clearly good value for money, as an alternative to someone going into institutional care."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 11 December 1990; c. 62.]

With the ILF, disabled people can organise their own care plans exactly to their needs. The care plan is developed with them, and they have control of the decision-making process. The care plans are also more appropriate and flexible than most local authority services, so disabled people can do more what they would like to do. They can mix with others of their choosing or enjoy their own company. The choice is theirs. Surely that is an eminently sensible Tory principle.

That new approach has been possible because, since 1988, frightened at the chaos that ensued after the social security changes, the Department worked with the Disablement Income Group to set up the independent living fund as a charity. The Minister knows that the ILF is not perfect, and DIG has told me that itself. Although the charity expedites independent living, it is nonetheless a charity and, because of those nuances, it cannot treat its recipients as equals. Disabled people regard that as the downside of the ILF. As its war cry states, they want "Rights, not Charity."

However, the Government now want to close the ILF and to transfer the responsibility to local authorities through the proposed community care legislation. That is a real cheek, from a Government who have passed 40 separate pieces of legislation against local authorities and who have tied and buckled them. The Government benignly say that local authorities will look after community care. That is nothing less than abdication by the Government, and it will have a disastrous effect on those affected.

As I have said, Jim and Monica Elder Woodward are a severely disabled husband and wife who live in my constituency and who are beneficiaries of the independent living fund. The husband works full time for social services, helping other disabled people. He has cerebral palsy; nevertheless, he is contributing economically, socially and politically to the life of his community. He is paying his taxes—even the poll tax, despite the fact that the rates recognised the additional costs and needs of disability, which the present insensitive levy does not.

The wife, Monica, has multiple sclerosis and is even more severely disabled. Her case was on Scottish Television tonight, when every viewer saw exactly how disabled she was and how dependent she was on the ILF. She has been given many electronic aids to reading and writing by the Open university because it recognises her brilliant mathematical skills. She already has two degrees —one in architecture, the other in social sciences. She is also a qualified social worker, having had responsibility for the development of services for disabled people in an English local authority.

Together, they enjoy music, the theatre and the arts. Together, they reinforce and respect each other's separate interests. The husband's interest is 'local and Scottish history. He is no Christy Nolan, but he also tries to write. His first book about disability will be published soon. His wife unwinds from mathematical problems by reading the *New Scientist.* Together, they make a fine, happy, loving couple.

But all that is possible only through a network of devoted helpers who come in at different times of the day to accomplish different tasks, from shopping to toileting —the network being wholly dependent on the ILF. There

is no guarantee that the local authority will take on the ILF's commitment of £170 a week to support the two of them, and that is the core of their concern. They have made a pact: if one goes into a residential home, the other will give up work, the house and the dog and follow, just to be together.

That is what the Government are driving people to consider seriously. That is why I am armed with 4,000 signatures from my constituency, spontaneously given by people who are concerned about the likes of Jim and Monica Elder Woodward. Such people have to consider giving up home, family and work, to live a life in sterile institutionalisation. They have a good future together in the community, if they have the resources to secure their support network. Without those resources, their future lies with aseptic hospital wards or barns of "homes for the incurable".

The ILF, this life-saving, life-enhancing system of community support for so many, and potentially so many more, is a victim of its success. It warranted only one paragraph in the White Paper on community care. It was dismissed without a thought as the responsibility of local government. Jim and Monica Elder Woodward want to eliminate the historical tendency for disabled people to be regarded as mere objects of charity.

Disability is a social phenomenon, created by the way in which the environment is built, by attitudes shown towards disabled people, by the structure of organisations, as well as by organisational behaviour. Disabled people are disabled not because they have cerebral palsy or MS, but by steps and doorways, by people saying, "No," and, "Go away," and by the inflexible systems and rules which overlook their specific needs. It is society that disables, not the medical condition. Surely it is up to society and its representatives in power, the Government, to break down those barriers and let disabled people in. All they are asking for are the tools to break down these barriers to an independent life in the community.

We in the House have begun by giving them the attendance allowance and mobility allowance. They are being combined in the Government's Bill to establish the disability living allowance, but it will continue the two-tier system of day and night, and day-only attendance allowance. In addition, a new lower rate of £10 will be introduced for those who hitherto did not need enough care to be eligible for the day-only allowance.

The ILF, however, is used to assess exact needs and to pay accordingly. In its present form, it has to operate a means test to ascertain the contribution that the individual has made. Nevertheless, the assessment is based on the practical needs of the individual and the estimated cost of satisfying them, and the cost will vary from individual to individual and from geographic region to region. These factors are not taken into account within the new disability living allowance. Instead of scrapping the uncharitable benefits of the ILF, I urge the Minister to integrate the new disability living allowance with the ILF system of independent living support.

For dismal reading, I refer to the Minister's final remarks in Committee yesterday. He said:

"We should still look to the local authorities to undertake the vast majority of cases."

Shortly after that, he said:

"We must consider the situation as we approach 1993. I should be extremely reluctant to envisage a situation in which a great gap appeared . . . disabled people were anxious"—the Minister is here referring to my remarks—

"to have an idea about the arrangements as soon as possible. I am conscious of that and would want to respond to that point but cannot do so this morning."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 11 December 1990, c. 63-4.]

Twenty-four hours have passed, and I ask the Minister to "respond to that point". I shall ask the Minister to do so when 48 hours have passed. I shall ask him to respond when four weeks have passed. The issue will not disappear. I am speaking on behalf of many disabled people who want their time to come now. The Minister's statements in Committee, which I have quoted, are insufficient and insulting as they stand. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to make a positive statement tonight. Let him understand that the issue will not go away.

12.36 am

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Despite the somewhat dramatic urgings of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), I welcome the opportunity to advance to a wider forum than that which was available to me yesterday in Committee—I suppose that there were more people assembled yesterday in Committee than there are present in the House tonight, but my remarks now might receive more attention than those made yesterday—some of the arguments which I deployed in response to an amendment which was proposed to the Committee considering the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill. If, however, the hon. Gentleman expects me within little more than 24 hours to go further than I went yesterday, he will be disappointed.

I object in a delicate sense to some of the comments of the hon. Member for Dumbarton which implied that the Government are less caring and less sensitive to the needs of disabled people than right hon. and hon. Members who represent the Opposition. We have demonstrated our commitment. The House will, perhaps, be weary of hearing the extent to which we have improved the totality of financial resources available to meet the needs of the long-term sick and disabled during our period of office. The real annual rate of increase is substantially in excess of anything that was achieved by our predecessors—the Labour Government—and the same can be said of the way in which we have extended the scope of, and made more flexible, the care that we give to the long-term sick and disabled.

We are discussing a Bill in Committee that will bring two new important benefits to meet the needs of disabled people. I am sure that in 1993, as planned, we shall be moving to a system of community care that will be much more locally responsive to the needs of the disabled. That is not a bad record, and nor is it a bad prospect when it comes to meeting the needs of the disabled.

I understand that Mr. and Mrs. Elder Woodward are not complaining, and did not complain to the hon. Member for Dumbarton, about the provision that is being made for them through the independent living fund. I understand that their concern is about the future of the scheme. I do not know what it was that led the hon. Gentleman to say—I assume that I heard him aright—that the ILF was doomed to end in 1992. I have never said that. To my knowledge, none of my colleagues, and certainly no one from the Treasury Bench, has suggested that the ILF is doomed to end in 1992.

Mr. McFall: Am I correct in thinking that the ILF has a five-year life span and therefore is not its future after 1992 in jeopardy? Can the Minister confirm that it will continue after 1992?

Mr. Scott: The period 1988 to 1992 is four years, not five. Therefore, the independent living fund's current trust deed will run out in June 1993 and that will be some months after the introduction of community care in April 1993. The hon. Gentleman's reference to 1992 may have been a slip of the tongue. The trust actually has a life until mid-1993 and that is beyond the time when we plan to introduce community care.

It might be worthwhile if I remind the House and perhaps a wider audience of the origins of the independent living fund. It was established by the then Department of Health and Social Security in co-operation with the Disablement Income Group and DIG (Scotland). It was set up partly in recognition of the fact that, after the 1988 social security reforms, severely disabled people would no longer be able to claim additional requirements payments, in particular for domestic support.

It was felt that some of the severely disabled people on income support would not be adequately compensated for that loss by the disability premiums that were to be available under the new income support system. At the same time, it was decided that it was necessary to provide help not only with domestic assistance, but also with personal care in order, as the hon. Gentleman said, to enable as many severely disabled people as possible not to have to enter institutional care, but to allow them to sustain their independence within their own homes with the support of their families or local communities. It was hoped that as many as possible would be able to achieve that aim with which all hon. Members would be sympathetic.

The fund, with cases examined individually under the guidance of independent trustees, offered an opportunity to deal flexibly and sensitively with that small group of people in a way that simply was not possible under the mainstream benefit system.

As I understood it, the hon. Gentleman was advocating that the ILF, either in the near future or certainly before its life expired, should be incorporated into the disability living allowance and, in effect, placed on a statutory basis. As I argued in Standing Committee E yesterday, I do not believe that that would be sensible or practical or would have a chance of meeting the needs of disabled people either as they are met presently under the ILF or will be met under the terms of the community care policy after 1993.

I will explain why I believe that by referring to an example I gave to the Standing Committee yesterday. The fund copes with about 7,000 individuals in a sensitive and flexible manner. We must set that against nearly 1 million people who, by 1992 or 1993, would be receiving either attendance allowance or the care component of the disability living allowance. There are in essence two concepts that do not come together in any real way. First, there is the statutory provision of attendance allowance —and the care component in due course of DLA—which gives a broad level of support as of right to a large number of people, as I said, about 1 million. That does not attempt to reflect the actual costs of disability of any individual, but it recognises that extra costs arise from particular levels of disability and that the state should recognise that and make payment in respect of it.

Secondly, against that, the independent living fund deals with a fraction of that number—as I said, about 7,000. It deals with them with discretion in a way that reflects the care needs and costs of the individuals or couples concerned. It is flexible, sympathetic and discretionary and the ILF trustees, staff and social workers work expertly on their behalf in a way in which no Department of Social Security office—there are 500 in the country—could conceivably respond to those needs.

Whatever differences we may have about the future, I ask the hon. Gentleman to recognise that, to attempt to incorporate such specialised provision for a relatively small minority of severely disabled people into the generality of the social security system or the care component of DLA, which is obviously a fraction of that, would simply not meet the needs of disabled people. Having served in a previous incarnation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the former Department of Health and Social Security, you will recognise the difficulties of drafting regulations that could reflect the flexibility that has been shown by the trustees and staff of the independent living fund. The hon. Gentleman is going up a false alley in making his suggestions. Perhaps he wants to look forward to a time when we have a long-term and developing role for the independent living fund. However, I take issue with his suggestion that, in some way, the Government are not fulfilling their duty to the fund.

Having returned from across the water, when I first confronted the situation that was to follow the 1988 reforms, and I could see a gap opening, I went to the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and asked him for some money for that purpose. We set up the fund with £5 million. In the first year, only £1 million was spent on the independent living fund. Now, only three years later, we are making provision in the current year for £32 million for the fund, and £62 million next year. We have recognised that there is a need, and we have been able to respond in that dramatically increased way to meet it.

It has become increasingly clear that it is more difficult for the trustees, staff and others involved with the independent living fund to meet the burdens placed upon them by the substantial increase in the caseload. If the hon. Gentleman will look back fairly, he will note that the Government, voluntary organisations and so on were dealing with a few hundred people. The number has turned out to be a few thousand, and, as the word has got around, it looks set to increase further as the months and years go by. We have made additional provision, but we must be prepared to look ahead to what the long-term pattern of care should be.

It is worth registering the fact that the independent living fund is not the only source of help for disabled people. There also are flat-rate benefits within the social security system. There is already help from local authorities and health authorities. I suspect that some have been pushing some of what should be their caseload on to the shoulders of the independent living fund. Voluntary organisations, families, friends and so on could play their part in helping disabled people and provide the help that they need to maintain their independence. Also, some of the best provision is to be gained from a partnership between family, friends, community, and statutory,

voluntary and other agencies. They can put together a comprehensive support package to enable individuals and couples to sustain their independence.

We have put forward proposals in our White Paper, "Caring for People", which, together with the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, set out the Government's policy framework for community care in the next decade and beyond. I do not want to go through that tonight, but we must accept two propositions: first, that the general social security system is not flexible or responsive enough to cope with the needs of that small group of people; secondly, that the number who are dependent upon support from the ILF is now growing to the extent that it is difficult for the ILF, the trustees, the staff and the social workers to bear the burden.

The sensible way forward, which is favoured by the Government, is for the decisions about support for such severely disabled people to be devolved to local level. There will be a transfer from the Department of Social Security, through the Department of the Environment, to local authorities to enable them to cope with those problems.

A local authority or a health authority should be able to assess the needs of individual disabled people in their locality. They could then decide on the care package that is needed to ensure that those individuals can maintain their independence in the community. The authorities should be financially neutral about such decisions so that there is no particular financial advantage to be gained from those decisions. That should be the best way to determine the matter.

As we approach 1993 and the implementation of care in the community policies, the ILF will still be going. It will, however, have built up a caseload that is substantially greater than the existing one. It is impossible to conceive that, on some particular date in 1993, the whole burden for the ILF will be transferred to local authorities. Some transitional period must be set and even a point at which some further cases are accepted.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's plea, may I say that it should be the proper expectation that, after a particular date, local authorities—with the support or otherwise of health authorities—should be able to assess the needs of individual disabled people to enable them to acquire independence. I also hope that some beneficiaries will be able to play a more active part in their care management. They should be able to assume responsibility for the day-to-day management of their carers—that has been a particular feature of the success of the ILF. Even though local authorities are unable to make cash payments in lieu of services, such responsibility would induce a great degree of choice. That is the best way forward on such a sensitive and difficult issue.

I look forward to sharing exchanges on this subject with the hon. Gentleman in the coming months.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 December 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 17 January.

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 18 December at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugees

1. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees are currently seeking permanent settlement in the United Kingdom; what are the broad and main reasons behind their application for settlement; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): On 30 September there were some 27,800 outstanding applications for asylum, most of which had been made in the previous 12 months. People claim asylum for a range of reasons, including a well-founded fear of persecution, economic factors, or as a means of circumventing normal immigration controls. In recent years fewer than a third of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have been recognised as having a well-founded fear of persecution. In view of the rising number of asylum applications the Government are urgently reviewing the arrangements for dealing with asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Greenway: Although I have every sympathy with refugees and asylum seekers who are in genuine difficulties, may I ask my right hon. Friend to take note of my concern and that of my constituents at the very large number of asylum seekers coming into the constituency, necessarily taking over much-needed housing that could be used for the homeless and others and placing an enormous strain on the area's resources? Two people came to see me separately last week and said, "We have applied for asylum for ourselves. Could we also apply for asylum for 10 dependants?' That sort of thing can build up to huge numbers. What can be done?

Mr. Baker: I am fully aware of the problem. About 10 years ago there were about 2,000 applications a year for refugee status. In the mid-1980s the figure rose to about 5,000 a year and stayed at that level for some time. In 1989 applications increased threefold to 16,000, and are currently running at over 25,000. As my hon. Friend says, after people have been received here they make applications for their dependants, the number of whom could be considerable. The problem is not unique to the United Kingdom. There is an increase in the number of refugees all over Europe, and all countries and Ministers with responsibilities such as mine are very concerned about it. We must ensure that something is done.

Mr. Cartwright: Will the Home Secretary reflect on the real hardship that is caused to applicants for refugee status by extremely lengthy delays in processing their applications? People from Somalia, for example, have had to leave families behind in refugee camps in Ethiopia and for such people delays of more than a year are hard to bear. Can he give any hope that the process will be speeded up?

Mr. Baker: Because of the rapid and sudden increase in the number of applications, it is currently taking an average of 17 months to vet and examine applications for refugee status. I discovered only last week that in several countries in Europe it takes much longer. We are doing what we can and the matter will be examined by the review that I have set up.

Woolf Report

2. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he anticipates receiving the Woolf inquiry report.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): This is a matter for Lord Justice Woolf, but I understand that he hopes to report early in the new year.

Mr. Sheerman: If the Woolf report appears after we finish Committee proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill it will be nothing short of a scandal, because everyone expects extremely sensible recommendations from Woolf which will affect, in particular, remand prisoners. Would not it be better to wait for Woolf rather than to carry through the dogma of the privatisation of the remand sector?

Mrs. Rumbold: The report from Lord Justice Woolf will certainly be published before the end of proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will carefully consider the recommendations.

Mr. Alexander: Although the immediate reaction to an incident such as that at Strangeways is to call for a full and wide-ranging report on prison conditions and inmate problems, would not it be equally helpful to have a much shorter factual report about what happened before the whole incident at Strangeways goes cold?

Mrs. Rumbold: I assure my hon. Friend that the immediate circumstances surrounding the events of April in Strangeways have caused the prison service to look carefully at future plans for accommodation, the type of accommodation and the behaviour and management of prisons and regimes. The report will obviously make a

number of recommendations, but the prison service has taken note of what needs to be done to improve prison regimes and security without waiting for that report.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Woolf inquiry deal with the problem of remand prisoners being held in police cells in Greater Manchester since the Strangeways incident? In particular, will the numbers being held in police cells now be dramatically reduced and who will pay the cost of their detention there? There is much concern in Greater Manchester that poll tax payers will have to foot the bill for all the overtime that is being worked by police officers looking after remand prisoners in police cells.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that K wing at Strangeways is now open and prisoners are being returned from police cells in Greater Manchester. It is hoped that up to 150 prisoners will be sent to Strangeways from police cells by Christmas. The Home Office has already paid £8 million to the police for their services and any further expenditure incurred by the police for looking after prisoners will be repaid.

Crime

3. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new plans he has to reduce the incidence of crime in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): We shall continue to pursue our policies to combat crime and protect the public. In England and Wales, additional people and money will be available to the police next year. The provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill will enhance the courts' powers to deal effectively with offenders. We have a growing and substantial programme of crime prevention measures, but effective action against crime needs the wholehearted support of everyone, as much in England and Wales as in Scotland.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister recognise that there is concern about the extent to which juvenile crime is increasing? Will he acknowledge that nearly half all recordable offences are committed by persons under the age of 21 and that the peak offending ages are between 15 and 18? Has the Home Office considered looking at the non-judicial tribunal system and the children's hearing system in Scotland, which is child centred and family based and provides a way of breaking into the cycle of recidivism which seems to bedevil criminal statistics?

Mr. Patten: For these purposes, Scotland is a different country with a different criminal code. We are always prepared to listen to what goes on in different countries and learn from it. I have looked at the possibility of introducing children's panels here, but there are successful alternatives, such as the use of cautioning. About 90 per cent. of those aged between 10 and 13 coming into the hands of the police are cautioned rather than proceeding to a court hearing of any sort. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that about half the crimes in England and Wales are committed by those under 21 and that the peak age for offending is in the mid-teens, but over the past 10 years juvenile crime in Britain has been decreasing and that continues to be the case. I hope that that means that we are laying the foundation for lower overall crime figures in the 1990s, as most people who offend as juveniles offend again as adults.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of countering international crime, particularly drug trafficking, is greater sharing of information and co-operation among member countries in the EC? What news is there from the Trevi group of Ministers in relation to greater collaboration among our police forces?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was in Rome at the Trevi meeting last Thursday and Friday. I do not want to slip too much into Foreign Office communiqué language, but there were useful and fruitful discussions. Let me raise the veil to some extent by saying that one possibility is that we may have a Europeanwide drug intelligence unit to share information among all western European countries and, I hope increasingly, the countries of central Europe and the USSR.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister introduce legislation to establish a register of authorised manufacturers and holders of skeleton keys? Is he aware that one of my constituents received correspondence saying that keys that suit different types of lock and which will open the majority of British and foreign cars are available somewhere within the United Kingdom? Is not it clear that many who buy those keys will commit criminal offences? Can a national register now be set up as a matter of urgency, or is this just part of the enterprise economy?

Mr. Patten: That was a silly ending to what was a rather good and important question.

Mr. Canavan: It is a key question.

Mr. Patten: If that counts as a joke in Scotland, I am glad that I penetrate only as far as the lowlands on my travels there.

The sort of equipment advertised in the letter to which the hon. Gentleman referred does not make it any easier to break into cars than any other material, such as pieces of metal, bent coathangers, and so on. Anyone who goes equipped for crime in possession of such an item—whether it purports to be a skeleton key or anything else that can be used for breaking and entering—can be charged and convicted.

BBC Licence Fee

4. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in the study being undertaken by independent consultants appointed by his Department into the ways in which the BBC spends its licence fee income.

9. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had recently with the director general of the BBC concerning the licence fee.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): We had discussions with the chairman and director general of the BBC before we asked Price Waterhouse to advise how licence fee

increases could be held below the retail prices index. Its report is now being completed and my right hon. Friend hopes to announce his decision in January.

Mr. Field: Are not vehicle excise duty and the television licence fee the last remaining bureaucratic and inefficient forms of taxation? Is not it time for the BBC to be set free and allowed to generate its own revenue—perhaps matched by the Government pound for pound, as they have done with their very successful programme of supporting the arts? Would not that create independence and improve efficiency?

Mr. Lloyd: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend that the licence fee system is inefficient. It raises 97 per cent. of the BBC's revenue and will remain its major source of income at least until the corporation's charter is renewed in 1996. The BBC is experimenting with subscription television, but its first essay was not successful owing to the failure of the decoding equipment. Nevertheless, the BBC is pursuing a dozen or more ideas that it hopes to introduce at the end of 1991. If my hon. Friend has any specific ideas that could be effective in raising additional revenue for the BBC, I hope that he will inject them into the discussions on the renewal of the corporation's charter. As they will begin in a couple of years' time, that leaves my hon. Friend with plenty of time to give thought to the matter.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister accept that the licence fee represents excellent value for money and, so far as Labour is concerned, is far superior to the alternative of subscription fees, which would undoubtedly be much more expensive for the average viewer? Our only qualification is that pensioners, particularly those on very low incomes, should be exempt from paying the licence fee. That would make it far less of a controversial issue. Any alternative system not offering exemption, such as subscriptions, would certainly be more expensive for pensioners.

Mr. Lloyd: One cannot reach a definite conclusion on different forms of financing the BBC until they have all been thoroughly examined. I agree that the BBC licence fee offers extremely good value for money. As the hon. Gentleman knows, concessionary licences are available to pensioners in local authority warden-controlled homes. The hon. Gentleman should talk to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen who specifically said that there should not be concessionary licences for all pensioners, because many of them have greater incomes than the non-pensioners who would have to pay extra for their licences to cover the cost of the pensioners' concession.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Is my hon. Friend aware that most people deeply resent paying such a large licence fee and that they will resent even more any increase, particularly as there is an easy way of increasing the BBC's revenue—by allowing advertising on Radios 1 and 2?

Mr. Lloyd: It is not simply a matter of allowing advertising, because the BBC's charter forbids that. We cannot change the existing charter, or consider renewing it in its present form, until it has expired.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister accept that, contrary to what was said by the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), a large body of people values the oasis of broadcasting that is free from advertising and commercial pressures? Will he give us an assurance that the Government have no intention of introducing advertising into the BBC and thereby reducing it to the same level as every other "income sourced" broadcasting concern?

Mr. Lloyd: As I said, the Government have no such intention. All the possible ways of raising revenue for the BBC, including maintaining the licence fee, will undoubtedly be considered when the charter comes up for renewal. I agree, however, with the hon. Gentleman's implication that many people consider the licence fee good value for money—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Moreover, research studies have shown that at least a good proportion of people say that they would be prepared to pay more.

Soccer Violence and Hooliganism

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to introduce new legislation to combat soccer violence and hooliganism.

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in respect of his recently announced legislative proposals to create new offences designed to help control hooliganism at football gounds.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We propose to create offences along the lines recommended by Lord Justice Taylor in his final report on the Hillsborough stadium disaster as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend recall the violence and destruction that took place in my constituency over the last May bank holiday weekend on the occasion of the Leeds United-Bournemouth football match, despite repeated requests from the police for the match to be rescheduled? Will he include in the proposed legislation a police power to veto the holding of such potentially dangerous matches, which was called for at the time by the chief constable of Dorset?

Mr. Lloyd: I certainly remember that match. It so concerned the former Home Secretary, my noble and learned Friend Lord Waddington—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—of very blessed memory—that he called in representatives of the Football Association and the league. Those representatives agreed that they would never hold a match when a chief officer of police had asked them not to do so on a particular date or in a particular place. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend.

Mr. David Evans: Does my hon. Friend accept that, although his proposals may be acceptable to the Government, the Taylor report was complete nonsense from start to finish and precipitated the demise of small clubs? Would not it be better if these hooligans were taken away and flogged, so that they would not go on inflicting damage on people's property week in, week out?

Mr. Lloyd: Like many other people, my hon. Friend is deeply concerned about hooliganism at football matches and has done much more than most to deal with it. However, I do not think that even he would consider, on reflection, that the Taylor report was complete and utter nonsense and I doubt whether he would want the Government to refrain from adding the offences mentioned in Taylor's recommendations to the list of those for which hooligans can be prosecuted.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the Minister aware that the West Yorkshire police force will find it very difficult to control soccer violence, because it is unable to maintain itself at the strength that the Home Office recognises is necessary for an efficient service? Owing to the poll tax rules, by March 1992 there will be 500 fewer police officers on the beat in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Lloyd: If the county council is unable to organise its finances to provide the police coverage that it should provide, that is a matter for the council itself. The grant from central Government for police expenditure is 51 per cent. and that local authority receives the same assistance as any other. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the number of arrests has fallen somewhat over the past year or so, although attendances have risen.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister admit that the Government have failed the sport of football through a series of errors made in pursuing, through the Football Spectators Act 1989, the mad idea of turnstile cards for fans and in not waiting for the Taylor report to be published before proceeding with legislation, as was positively proposed by the Labour party? Does the Minister accept that the consequences of the errors and U-turns have caused a serious delay in getting much-needed legislation aimed at combating hooliganism on the statute book?

Mr. Lloyd: The Government would have been worthy of blame had they not created the legislative framework to make possible decisions such as the membership scheme. Only part of the Act is rendered unnecessary by later agreements. Other aspects of the Act are on the statute book and are of great use. If the hon. Gentleman will reflect on it, I hope that he will agree.

Mr. Butcher: I hope that my hon. Friend will look further into the causes of hooliganism and the best way of dealing with it. Will he instruct his officials to call upon Mr. George Curtis of Coventry City football club who has a great deal of expertise in this matter? Is my hon. Friend aware that Coventry's policy of treating fans with respect and consideration inside the ground while being strict, fair and immediate in law enforcement outside the ground has worked well?

Mr. Lloyd: It is true that the last people thought of by some clubs are their fans. If they were given much greater attention, as is increasingly the case with most clubs, it is likely that the problems would decrease.

Mr. Hardy: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the Minister's wholly unsatisfactory reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), I should like to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Chief Constable John Newing

7. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will obtain for the library of his Department a copy of the speech delivered at the London conference on crime and policing on 28 November by Chief Constable John Newing of Derbyshire.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Copies of Mr. Newing's speech have been obtained and placed in the Home Office library. The Government are continuing to support police efforts to ensure public confidence through the delivery of an efficient and effective service. I fully endorse the work of all police officers to improve the quality of service and increase the confidence of the public in the police.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Home Secretary share the concern expressed by Chief Constable Newing that there is a crisis of confidence and morale in the police force at all ranks and, in particular, that there is discrimination against women and black serving officers? Does he accept the recommendation—or will he consider it—that after 30 years the time is ripe for a new royal commission on the police?

Mr. Baker: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion and I do not accept the argument that there is a fundamental lack of confidence in the police. I appreciate the fact that some recent events—I do not wish to underestimate them if they involve a miscarriage of justice—have attracted a great deal of attention, but it is important to remember that a small number of officers was involved in those cases and it would be wrong to condemn the entire police service on account of that. Over 125,000 uniformed police officers work day in and day out on the streets of our cities dealing with law and order and they deserve our support.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Derbyshire policemen are as able and dedicated as any police officers in the country and that the low performance of the Derbyshire police is an appalling reflection on the political control exercised upon them by Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council? It is a warning of what would happen were Labour to win the next election.

Mr. Baker: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The chief inspector of police has issued a report on the state of Derbyshire constabulary. It is one of the most worrying reports that has ever been issued. It is not a reflection on the chief constable or the police officers in Derbyshire, but a condemnation of Derbyshire county council and Derbyshire police authority which, for the past eight years, have starved the police of resources. The last major capital building programme of a police station in Derbyshire ended in 1981. There has been no increase in police numbers in Derbyshire since 1987, which shows Labour's priorities when it is in office.

Mr. Janner: Does not the speech of the chief constable of Derbyshire show that police resources and morale throughout the east midlands are crumbling? Is the Secretary of State aware that, because of a series of serious murder inquiries and other stresses on resources, Leicestershire police has a deficit of £1·5 million and last week announced cuts in staff, in policing and in the protection that citizens are entitled to expect? Will he be kind enough to look into the problem of the Leicestershire police deficit and provide us with some help?

Mr. Baker: Since we have been in office, there has been an increase in police strength of more than 26,000 men and women and next year there will be a further 700. Derbyshire was offered an increase in police officers last year but it turned it down, preferring to spend the money on other priorities.

Mr. Shersby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that by failing to provide the necessary support, Derbyshire county council is failing in its duty under section 4 of the

Police Act 1964? What action will he take as Home Secretary to make sure that it abides by that Act to ensure adequate policing for the people of Derbyshire?

Mr. Baker: I am, of course, concerned about that point and have asked the chief inspector to take particular interest in what is happening in Derbyshire. His report showed, for example, that its fingerprint bureau was on the brink of collapse, that its casualty bureau could not withstand any realistic pressure and that many of its police stations were in a disgraceful condition. I ask the Labour party to appreciate that that is what happens when a Labour authority has been in power and places policing right at the bottom of its list for eight years.

Mr. Hattersley: The speech to which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred in his question did not concern, as the Home Secretary chose to interpret it, a collapse of confidence in the police, but the collapse in police morale throughout the United Kingdom. When the Home Secretary begins to talk to policemen, he will discover that that collapse in morale is widespread and desperately dangerous. Knowing as he must, or as he soon will, that one of the main causes of the collapse in police morale is the Government's refusal to implement Edmund-Davies as far as it applied to the police housing allowance, is he prepared to look at that again?

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman talks about the collapse of police morale, but he should note that the chief constable said that the collapse of morale in Derbyshire was because of the fact that Derbyshire county council has put the police at the bottom of its list for eight years. When the right hon. Gentleman talks of his commitment to law and order and the way in which the Labour party is concerned about law and order, I shall say to him, "Derbyshire", which shows what Labour is like in office.

Weapons

8. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the Firearms Consultative Committee to discuss the European Commission's draft directive on the control of acquisition and possession of weapons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My noble Friend Lord Kimball has written to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary with the views of the committee on the draft directive. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Colvin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that under the draft directive the rights of British shooters, as covered by British domestic law, will not be inhibited in any way? Will he clarify the position on the possession and use of automatic shotguns by British domestic residents and by visitors from overseas and the European Community?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend asked a lot of questions, but I think that I can respond by answering the first part. The directive will leave domestic law as the ruling law on firearms in this country as in other European countries. The weapons that are now allowed will continue to be allowed. The directive will deal only with the rules governing the legitimate movement of weapons between countries, with the law of the recipient country determining what is allowed.

Mr. Ron Brown: Does the Minister agree that it is not necessary to see police walking around Heathrow with large machine guns? It frightens passengers and tourists and it frightens the hell out of me.

Mr. Lloyd: The directive has nothing to do with that point. I think that most people would require that the police use the means at their disposal to ensure maximum security. That factor would determine the reactions of most people.

Citizenship

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to process applications for British citizenship.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average time now being taken to complete applications is 23 months for registrations and 34 months for naturalisations.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, which is somewhat disappointing. Several constituents in my area, particularly those from Poland, were recently told that there would be an 18-month delay in processing their applications. What more can be done and what is being done to speed up the processing of the backlog of applications?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree with my hon. Friend that the situation is unsatisfactory. The reason is the enormous influx of applications at the deadline at the end of 1987, to meet the provisions of the British Nationality Act 1981. The huge influx reached its peak in December 1987 and we have reached the final applications. It is possible that the waiting time will increase a little over the next few weeks. I believe that it will then decrease rapidly because of the steps that we have taken to provide extra staff in the next financial year, to streamline procedures and so on.

Mr. Tony Banks: I put it to the Minister that this is a disgracefully long time in which to consider applications. It is made that much worse because the applicants have submitted their cheques, which the Government have banked and on which, no doubt, they are getting a good interest rate, given the present level. Will the Minister be prepared to look at a delayed payment system, whereby people can at least hang on to the money and pay it when the Government are ready to process their applications?

Mr. Lloyd: The section is running at a loss this year. If we were to make an adjustment according to costs, the charge would have to go up. However, the hon. Gentleman is right in saying that it is a long delay. As he knows, if a Member writes to us about a constituent who is being grossly inconvenienced by the delay, we shall give that application a measure of priority.

Sir Bernard Braine: Is my hon. Friend aware that his first reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) was most unsatisfactory? Is he further aware that many of us have found that the lengthy delays in processing such applications cause a great deal of misery and heartache? They are totally unnecessary in a well-organised department. Will he do something about them?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not accept the implications of my right hon. Friend's remarks. He knows that the huge influx was

caused by people all putting in their applications at the same time, when many had had opportunities to do so since 1973. We have to choose the way in which we direct priorities in the Home Office. If my right hon. Friend looked objectively at the situation, I do not think that he would agree that it would be right, for instance, to take away resources from processing applications by refugees, when their future depends upon it, in order to give passports to people who are already properly settled here.

Magistrates Courts

12. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the operation of the magistrates courts dealing with poll tax cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are keeping the operation of the statutory arrangements under review and we have asked all justices' clerks in England and Wales to provide information about the community charge enforcement work load. Most cases are going very well.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister realise that hundreds of thousands of people have been dealt with far worse than criminals in the magistrates courts in recent weeks? In Warrington and in Lymington, people have been dragooned through, eight or 10 at a time. In Hitchin and in Stevenage, the courts have been closed to the public. In a number of magistrates courts from Coventry down to Bournemouth, people have been denied the right of representation. In Grantham last Friday, a man was put into prison, but, unlike a criminal who gets 50 per cent. remission of his sentence and although his only crime was that he was poor and could not afford to pay the poll tax, he will get no remission on his sentence. Will the Minister review the procedures and stop treating poor debtors as if they were criminals?

Mr. Patten: Certainly not. People should pay the bills due to their local authorities. If they do not, they should face the consequences.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House at what level the number of summonses for community charge defaulters is running at the moment in comparison with the number of defaulters whom one would have expected to be summonsed at this time of year under the old rating system?

Mr. Patten: It is not much different. The only difference is that the courts are operating a new procedure and a new set of processes. They have not been aided by hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and some of his hon. Friends, who have tried to incite people to disrupt proceedings in the magistrates courts to the maximum of their ability.

Burglaries

13. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries of homes and commercial premises have taken place in the past 12 months.

Mr. John Patten: In the 12 months to June 1990, 477,000 residential burglaries and 427,000 commercial burglaries were recorded by the police in England and Wales.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister agree that those figures reveal that the number of burglaries and break-ins has now reached epidemic proportions? Does he further agree that in the urban areas where it is almost impossible to get insurance because of repeated instances of break-ins, it would be worth while for the Department to speak to the insurance companies to try to persuade them to take a rather more helpful view about providing insurance? Does he agree that there is a need to provide burglar alarms for those who cannot afford to have their homes properly fitted with alarms in areas where there is a high incidence of burglary?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I believe that the British insurance industry could do far more, by the use of premium payments and other methods, to encourage people to protect their own property, which would ensure that people in high crime areas would not have difficulties in obtaining insurance. However, all of us can learn a bit from Merseyside. While burglaries have been going up in England and Wales, as I have already said, in Merseyside, thanks to the activities of 5,000 neighbourhood watch or home watch schemes and to the Merseyside police, the number of burglaries dropped by about 13 per cent. in the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Trevi Group

15. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the meetings of Ministers and of the respective working groups scheduled for the Trevi group for the remainder of 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I attended the Trevi meeting in Rome on 7 December. The cycle of working group meetings will begin again in January under the Luxembourg presidency.

Mr. Archer: That makes it easier. Will the right hon. Gentleman bring us up to date on the talks arising from the proposal for a common information system? Who will qualify for the doubtful privilege of inclusion? What personal information will be recorded and who will have access to it? Will the right hon. Gentleman at least undertake to keep the House informed?

Mr. Baker: Ministers agreed in Rome to commission a detailed feasibility study on a Community-wide computerised information service to help combat serious crime. We shall play an active part in that with a view to ensuring that any system works effectively and contains suitable safeguards on personal information. I quite understand the significance and importance of that, and I shall keep the House fully informed.

Sentencing Council

16. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce a sentencing council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government's plans are set out in the Criminal Justice Bill, which will provide a coherent framework for consistency in sentencing. Those proposals build on the valuable work of the Court of Appeal and, most importantly, respect the independence of the judiciary.

Mr. Hind: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the plans announced by the Labour party for a sentencing council and for some form of court inspectorate cut across the constitutional pillars of our democracy, in which the Executive and judiciary carry out separate functions, and the judiciary protects the man in the street?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend must be referring to the speech made yesterday by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), in which he regurgitated the ideas of the 1960s and 1970s, suggesting that courts are not there for punishment and introducing the most violent attack on the independence of the judiciary. The right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition are producing the ideas of terminally tired Labourism. They are a pair of politically beached whales.

Miss Lestor: Will the right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the whole House and the country have been shocked by the suicide of 15-year-old Philip Knight, who was locked up for 23 hours a day in an adult prison, Swansea, where his suicidal tendencies and misery were clearly not identified? Does he further agree that we need a review of remand policies to make it clear that young people should not be put in adult prisons?

Mr. Patten: I thought that I was leaving on rather a good exit line, but I am pleased to have been brought back by the hon. Lady to answer that extremely important question. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department issued new guidance to the prison service. Either before Christmas or shortly after, I hope to be able to make further announcements about the better provision of remand for boys aged 15 and 16.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. After my duties in the House, I shall be leaving for the European Council in Rome.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Prime Minister find time to give another impetus to his ideal of a classless society, in which public power is not abused, by responding to the growing movement for constitutional reform? In the spirit of the times, will he institute cross-party talks on a Bill of Rights, decentralised government and a fair voting system?

The Prime Minister: As I have made clear to the hon. Gentleman and as he will know from what I have said in recent weeks, my vision of a classless society deals with increased opportunity and choice. I have no immediate proposals for constitutional change.

Mr. Luce: As protectionism would do much to undermine the economies of the world and to increase unemployment, will my right hon. Friend take a positive lead this weekend in the European summit to persuade the Community to adopt a less protectionist stance with regard to agriculture, with a view to unblocking the GATT negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I shall be arguing for a positive statement from the European Council, which will make absolutely clear the Community's determination to make a success of the GATT negotiations. They are extremely important and the cost if they fail, to us and to many other countries, is very great.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to confirm that the large rises in unemployment are a direct and deliberate result of his policies?

The Prime Minister: Everyone regrets the rise in unemployment, but, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, I have been warning for some months that if wage rises stay high, they will have a necessary effect on jobs.

Mr. Kinnock: Does not it strike the right hon. Gentleman as somewhat dishonest that, whenever unemployment goes down, it is evidence of the Government's success; but whenever it goes up, it is evidence of somebody else's failure? Why is not the right hon. Gentleman man enough to own up properly to the reasons for the rise in unemployment and to accept the blame for his own policies? As he knows the economic and human cost of unemployment, what is he going to do now to stop unemployment rising still further?

The Prime Minister: Upon the right hon. Gentleman's own premise, he knows precisely the success that the Government have had. If he looks across the whole Community, he will see that our rate of unemployment is among the lowest in the Community, at 6·2 per cent. Long-term unemployment is still falling and the extent to which the economy has been revived can also be seen in the fact that 50 per cent. of those who have just lost their jobs will be back in work within three months.

Mr. Kinnock: This is the second time in a decade that the Government have brought severe recession and rising unemployment to this country. Will the Prime Minister now answer the question? What does he intend to do to stop unemployment rising further?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have a higher percentage of our work force in work than almost any other country in Europe. If the right hon. Gentleman is so worried about unemployment, why does he support a national minimum wage, which would cost three quarters of a million jobs?

Sir Peter Tapsell: May I put it to my right hon. Friend that when he leaves for Rome later this afternoon, he will carry with him the exceptional good wishes of the British people, who have been greatly impressed by his decisions and his bearing since he became Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall certainly endeavour to ensure at the European Council not only that we protect British interests but that we consider the interests of Europe as a whole.

Q2. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: Does not the Prime Minister recognise that Christmas for many of my constituents and many hundreds of thousands of people throughout Britain will be marred by having to make appearances in court because of their inability to pay their poll tax? When will the Government recognise that making promises—or alleged promises—to do something in two years' time is not acceptable? Will he do something to remove the requirement on the lowest-paid people to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax and increase the level of income at which some rebate can be paid to those who cannot afford to pay their poll tax?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, a large number of people are eligible for substantial rebates. The hon. Gentleman would make a good start by persuading some of his hon. Friends to pay their community charge.

Q3. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gill: When my right hon. Friend goes to Rome this weekend, will he bear it in mind that, in the final analysis, the British Government must go whichever way gives British agriculture and industry the best prospects of creating wealth for the people who live in these islands? Will he tell our European partners that wealth creation through free trade remains our top priority?

The Prime Minister: I shall be happy to carry that message to all members of the Community. I very much agree with my hon. Friend. A great deal of the growing prosperity in recent years has clearly been the result of the steady removal of barriers to trade. We wish that to continue.

Mr. Boateng: Last weekend in London the severe weather shelters were kept closed because it was not "cold enough". In the Prime Minister's classless, caring, opportunity society, how cold does it have to be and for how long before the homeless are given the opportunity of shelter and warmth?

The Prime Minister: In view of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, he may be interested to know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will announce within the next few days a substantial number of new bed spaces in hostels and long-term housing in central London. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like this, but it is directly related to the point that the hon. Gentleman made. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is talking to front-line agencies and together they are developing new and more effective ways of getting rough sleepers off the streets. I should have thought that Opposition Members would wish to hear that and support it.

Q4. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Moate: With regard to the Gulf crisis, will my right hon. Friend reaffirm today that any partial withdrawal by Iraq from Kuwait would be wholly unacceptable and that Saddam Hussein must be required to comply in full with all the requirements of the United Nations resolutions?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to confirm absolutely what my hon. Friend says. Partial withdrawal simply will not do. Iraq needs to comply fully with all the provisions of the UN Security Council resolutions. That means total and unconditional withdrawal. The United Nations has made it clear that the use of military force will be justifiable if Saddam Hussein has not met the requirements of the resolutions in full by 15 January.

Mr. Canavan: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is absolutely diabolical in this day and age for a 20-year-old, unemployed person to be sent to prison for failing to pay the poll tax? Would he care to reflect on the fact that if everybody touched the forelock and obediently stumped up the poll tax, herself would still be in 10 Downing street, Tarzan would still be languishing on the Back Benches and the poll tax would be under no immediate threat whatever?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are examining the whole question of the community charge and in due course we shall make a statement.

Q5. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sumberg: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to reflect on two significant, but contrasting parliamentary achievements that have recently occurred: first, that he is now the youngest serving Prime Minister of this country this century, and, secondly that his opposite number is the longest-serving Opposition leader in parliamentary history?

The Prime Minister: I shall no doubt grow older in the job and no doubt so will the right hon. Gentleman.

Q6. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister agree that when he answered my question on Polaris last Thursday, he was unhappy with his answer? Will he confirm that, having had more time to look into the problems associated with Polaris, he must be even more unhappy? Is he confident that Polaris will go on being an effective deterrent for the next four years and can be kept safely at sea? Would not this be a good time to scrap it and put forward proposals for getting rid of our nuclear seaborne deterrent as part of the negotiations in the spring?

The Prime Minister: The nuclear deterrent has served this country extremely well in the past few years and I have no plans to change that policy.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Was the Prime Minister encouraged, as I was, by the reports of the Dail Eireann debate yesterday, which showed growing support for amendments to articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's

constitution? As those two articles claim jurisdiction over a part of the United Kingdom's territory, will the Prime Minister encourage that process?

The Prime Minister: I certainly propose to study carefully what was said yesterday.

Q7. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: On this our first opportunity, may I on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment as Prime Minister? Recently, he will have recognised that it is necessary to create confidence and trust in Northern Ireland to have political progress. Is he aware of the unease and alarm created by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland three weeks ago when he said that the British Government had

"no . . . strategic, or economic interest in Northern Ireland"?

Will he, therefore, prove that he is the leader of the Conservative and Unionist party, not just the Conservative party, and support and strengthen the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the troops are in Northern Ireland both because that is the wish of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the security of the people of Northern Ireland. That is and remains the position. It is generally accepted throughout Northern Ireland the my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is one of the best friends that the Province has had for a long time.

Q8. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Is the Prime Minister aware that when he spoke recently about a classless society, he struck a chord with many of my constituents in Basildon? Does he recall that when he visited our town some time ago, he recognised that it had a fine community spirit, despite local socialists who try to cause class divisions by their support of Militant Tendency and the like? Does he agree that it is only the policies of the Conservative party that allow people to get ahead and that Opposition policies cause division and hold people back?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It always has been that way. The Conservative party is determined to increase choice and opportunity and, unlike Opposition Members, we shall not put barriers in the way of such opportunity and choice.

Q9. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Would the Prime Minister like to reflect upon the fact that the appalling unemployment figures announced today will be further augmented next month, not least by my constituents who are employed by a company called Euroshape, who had redundancy offered to them this week without any hope of pay? That company once employed 300 people, but what hope can the right hon. Gentleman offer them following his announcement on 27 October last year, when he said that the harsh truth was that if the policy was not hurting, it was not working? Will that message apply this year and next Christmas as well?

The Prime Minister: As the policy self-evidently is working, we shall first see a considerable reduction in inflation in the next few months. Following that reduction we shall return to a period of growth. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, in the past 10 years, our growth record has exceeded that of any other European country.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 DECEMBER—Proceedings in Committee of the Criminal Justice Bill on new clauses relating to capital punishment.

TUESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Atomic Weapons Establishment Bill.

Motion to take note of EC document relating to the establishment of a programme for research and technological development in human capital and mobility. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 19 DECEMBER—Motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

THURSDAY 20 DECEMBER—Debates on the motion for the Adjournment.

It may be for the convenience of the house if I indicate that the business for the first week after the Christmas Adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Severn Bridges Bill.

Motion on the International Development Association (Ninth Replenishment) Order.

Motion on the Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 15 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Export and Investment Guarantees Bill.

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY—Opposition day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate on an opposition motion. Subject for debate to be announced.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—There will be a debate on a motion to take note of the Ibbs report on the House of Commons services.

Proceedings on the Census Confidentiality Bill *[Lords]*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 18 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

[Tuesday 18 December
Relevant European Community Document
7053/90 Training and Mobility of Researchers
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxx (1989-90), para 3]

Mr. Grocott: May I ask the Leader of the House when we shall debate the Cullen report into the Piper Alpha disaster? We know that there was negligence and that much needs to be done. Surely we owe it to the families of those who were killed to debate that report as a matter of urgency.

Yesterday, during Environment Question Time—many hon. Members now present were also present then—the discussion on the poll tax was stifled because of the disgraceful way in which the Secretary of State for the Environment linked no fewer than eight questions. Will the Leader of the House ensure that Ministers do not stand at the Dispatch Box next week or any other week and link eight questions in that way? Will he tell the new Secretary of State for the Environment that we are used to him abusing the Mace, but will he stop abusing the Order Paper?

On the Government's plans on opting-out hospitals, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is disgraceful that there is no established procedure for debating the opting-out proposals, which are causing concern to people throughout the country? Is he aware that the statement last week was totally inadequate and that many Opposition Members who had been leading campaigns against opting out were unable to take part in that short question and answer session? When can we have a full-scale debate before any more damage is done to the health service?

Mr. MacGregor: The answer to the first part of that question is that I note the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate, but suggest that it is a matter best left for discussion through the usual channels.

The answer to the second part, about the linking of questions, is that the questions were all on the same subject. The matter has been raised through the usual channels and I am considering the points that Opposition Members have made and which the hon. Gentleman made today.

The answer to the third part is that trust hospitals were widely debated many times when the Bill, now the Act, was proceeding through the House, so the issues and principles have been thoroughly aired. As the hon. Gentleman said, the Secretary of State for Health made a full statement on the point recently, so I see no need to provide for a debate in Government time. If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends feel so strongly about the matter, opportunities are open to them to have debates on the issue in the House, and I have made one available in the first week back.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): In the debate last week on the future of the European Community, the Foreign Secretary referred several times to the debate that we would be having on the economic aspects of that matter—specifically, on the intergovernmental conference on European monetary union. May we have an assurance that we shall have that debate fairly soon, so that at least there will be a theoretical possibility that the remarks made in the House during the debate could be taken into account by Ministers before irrevocable decisions are taken?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I agree that it is an important matter and that there is need for a debate on it. I hope to arrange one soon after the House returns.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As a former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Leader of the House knows how important the annual hill farming review is to the farming industry. May we be assured that a statement on the matter will be made before the Christmas recess? Will he also provide a weekly progress report on the setting up of the Scottish Select Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: On the second point, I doubt whether I would want to give a weekly progress report, because I

have already said that I think it unlikely that progress will be made—*[Interruption.]*—so I would be wasting the time of the House if I gave a weekly progress report.

To answer the first point, I cannot guarantee a statement being made next week, but there will be opportunities for the matter to be raised, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to do so, on the motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): In the light of the bad weather last night, leading to floods and flood warnings on the Suffolk-Norfolk coast, will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early statement to be made so that we may see whether the Government are making progress towards setting up one authority with overall responsibility for coastal protection around the whole of Britain?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend will know, I am aware of, and very concerned about, the incidents to which he referred. We have a heavy programme next week, so it is unlikely that there will be a statement on the subject, but he could raise the issue on the motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I know that the right hon. Gentleman is aware of the tragedy that occurred yesterday, with the loss of six crewmen on the fishing vessel Premier. He and hon. Members have expressed their sympathy to my constituents, and that is much appreciated. On a more practical note, will the Department of Transport, in the coming days, advise the House or myself as the constituency hon. Member, or the local fishing office, of measures to try to raise the vessel, which I understand is lying in about 130m of water? That will be an expensive operation, but it is possible that the bodies of some of my missing constituents are contained in it, and obviously we should like to see every effort made to raise the vessel.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the whole House will want to express sympathy to the relatives and for their concerns about the incident—the hon. Lady is right about that. I shall draw her point to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will want to make some comments about the tragic incident in his opening speech in the debate later this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend see whether it might be possible to hold a debate in the new year, perhaps during the first week back, on the BBC and public service broadcasting? He may be aware that, during questions to the Home Office today, there was little opportunity for Conservative Members to say how much they admire the BBC, which has been brought to a pinnacle of achievement by Sir Ian Trethowan and Lord Swann, and we hope that it will continue its fine work.

Mr. MacGregor: It will not be possible in the first week back, for which I have already announced the business. I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate, but I will bear his points in mind.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): The Leader of the House will have seen early-day motion 49, which has attracted the support of 164 Members of all parties.

[That this House welcomes the book To Encourage Others by David A. Yallop, calling for an independent public inquiry into the hanging of Derek Bentley in 1952; requests the Home Secretary to set up the inquiry as a matter of urgency; hopes that such a request will lead to a posthumous pardon; and feels that this will end a grave miscarriage of justice which leaves a permanent blot on the British judicial system—the hanging of an innocent man.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman ask his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to make a statement as soon as possible so that this matter can be debated? And will he ask the Home Secretary whether he has considered the video sent him by Thames Television dealing with the same matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering representations made to him as a result of the book on the subject. I am not sure about the video, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on law and order? Does he agree that selective obedience to the law is a recipe for anarchy? Is he aware that yesterday the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) appeared in court for non-payment of the community charge? Is it not wrong——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must not deal with matters of detail like that. The question should be about the business for next week.

Mr. MacGregor: There have been many opportunities —they have all been taken—to condemn Members of this House who have refused to pay their community charge, the more so because that affects many people who are less well off than they are.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that his negative answers to requests for a statement on haemophiliacs now look less than impressive, to put it kindly? As the nuclear test veterans have the same kind of powerful case but have been brushed aside by the Government and are dying, and as they should not be forced to go to the courts, will he arrange for a statement on those veterans next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can arrange for a statement on the point, but I shall have a look at it and discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

I did not give negative answers. I made it very clear that we were promising to keep the figure under review, and we reached a quick decision on that review. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman welcomes the decision that has since been made on the haemophiliacs.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for another and early debate on GATT? Is he aware that the top 20 British manufacturing companies still make more than half their foreign-earned profits from the north American market? This is a vital issue for employment in this country. Does he agree that this country and this House are in a unique position to mediate, through our Ministers, between the interests of north America and Europe? If the British tradition of free trade does not prevail across the Atlantic, we shall all be impoverished.

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree about the importance of the GATT negotiations, not least in the context to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention. There is no disagreement about that in the Government. My right hon. Friends have often made that clear and I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the Government have played an important part in trying to keep the negotiations moving and to reach a successful conclusion to them. We shall continue to try. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that he will make further efforts in that regard this weekend.

We shall have to decide an appropriate moment, whether in the form of a debate or a statement, at which the House can further deal with these issues and I shall bear that in mind.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, as the traditional defender of Back Benchers' rights, share the concern of many hon. Members that five Departments of government no longer have Select Committees scrutinising their work. Could the Lord President of the Council tell us whether the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will next week tell the House why he still opposes a Select Committee on Northern Irish Affairs, whether he now espouses a policy of condominium government for Northern Ireland or whether some other form of con-ship is being manufactured for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: Again, I do not think that a statement on that matter would be appropriate next week. However, I shall ask my right hon. Friend to communicate again with the hon. Gentleman about the issue.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): My right hon. Friend may be aware that on 1 January 1991 the United Nations Decade Against Drug Abuse begins. Would not it be appropriate when we reassemble to debate these important matters?

Mr. MacGregor: They have been raised many times. My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw our attention to the fact that the United Nations Decade Against Drug Abuse begins on 1 January. We warmly welcome all international efforts to draw attention to the danger of drug misuse. As my hon. Friend knows, Britain has been at the forefront of efforts to co-ordinate policy with other European countries on that matter and I know that we shall remain there.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the Leader of the House aware that the answer given by the Prime Minister today to the question about unemployment by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition showed the Government's complete disregard for rising unemployment? Is he also aware that the unemployment figures for this month are the worst since 1981? Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friends to arrange for an early debate in Government time, because the Government are responsible for the level of unemployment, so that the matter can be debated and unemployment may return to the Government's agenda?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely reject the hon. Gentleman's accusations about my right hon. Friend. It is important to remember that the Government's policies have created well over 3 million extra jobs since 1983. It is also relevant that we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Community. The hon. Gentleman asks for a debate, but he knows that we have debated economic matters a good deal in the past few weeks. Therefore, I cannot promise another early debate on the matter.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): On the subject of Monday's debate and votes on capital punishment, how do the Government propose to deal with the ingenious but alarming new clause that has been tabled in the name of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and several of his hon. Friends? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the new clause, which seeks to abolish the death penalty for treason in time of war, raises a wide range of fundamental issues relating to the defence of the realm and constitutional principles which are utterly different from the normal arguments about capital punishment for murder? Is not that quite the wrong way for the House to tackle——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That issue would be more appropriate for Monday's debate.

Mr. Aitken: My question is simply this: will the Government allow the Treason 1790 Act to be repealed on a free vote on such a mish-mash of an amendment?

Mr. MacGregor: For Monday's debate, the Government have tried to ensure a range of clauses on the matter of capital punishment so that the House can not only have a proper debate but can take decisions by a free vote. I think that is how the House would wish to proceed.

My hon. Friend draws attention to the clause in the name of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and some of his hon. Friends. It is not for me but for the Chairman of Ways and Means to decide whether to select that clause for debate. I think that my hon. Friend has a point when he says that it is in a different category from the other new clauses. If it is selected, it will be for the House to express its view in the debate. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who hopes to speak in the debate, will express some of his views on that matter and on the other clauses.

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 232, which draws attention to the plight of the elderly and the disabled in the recent blizzards?

[That this House is gravely concerned at the plight of the elderly, the disabled and all low income groups; is aware that the beauty of the Christmas card landscape, effected by the artistry of frost and snow, hides a relentless, remorseless enemy which brought death to some in the current severe winter weather and put at risk many more thousands who were required to use fuel to excess in the circumstances because of the abnormality of the extreme cold weather; and calls on the Prime Minister to bring an end to this risk by activating immediately the special cold weather payments.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman remind the Prime Minister that an unheated home soon becomes an icy tomb and will he make the strongest representations to him to authorise the payment of the severe weather allowance?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that specific terms and conditions have to be met before that allowance can be paid, and that is the right way in which to approach the matter.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): When we debate on 17 January how we conduct ourselves in the House, may we have an opportunity to vote on some issues and make some decisions? I have been in the House for nearly four years, during which time we have often debated these subjects, but we have never had an opportunity to vote for changes. Opposition Members too have campaigned long and hard for decisions to be made. May we do that on 17 January?

Mr. MacGregor: The debate on 17 January is on the Ibbs report, which is about the finance and administration of the House. It is an extremely good report and I pay tribute to Sir Robin Ibbs, and all who work with him, for his work on it. The report contains clear and specific recommendations and I hope that the House will express its views on those in the debate so that action can be taken on them.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does not the Leader of the House know that it is Government, not Opposition, policy to allow hospitals to opt out, and that one in five of the hospitals proposing to opt out are on Merseyside in my area, where there is no public or staff support for the proposals? Those proposals have never been debated on the Floor of the House. The people in my area are demanding an answer from the Government and an opportunity for their representatives to raise the issue on the Floor of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: The whole issue of the Government's NHS trust policy has been frequently debated in the House and in Committee. Many opportunities for raising specific cases in the House are available to hon. Members—through questions, Adjournment debates and many other ways. It is also possible to do so on Supply days. In the past, the Opposition have used Supply days not to debate their policies but usually to debate Government policies.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend register the widespread dismay expressed on both sides of the House in relation to a glaring omission from next week's business statement? Tuesday will be the first anniversary of the Security Service Act 1989, which enabled the Security Service to have a tribunal for the airing of complaints from the public. During the first year of its operation, the Commissioner of the Security Service is entitled to produce a report and to report to the House. Why is that report not to be debated in the House next week?

Mr. MacGregor: It will not be debated next week because we have other important business to debate next Tuesday, but I shall look into my hon. Friend's point and write to him about it.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the suffering and loss of life caused to animals being transported live to the continent for slaughter, on which there are a number of early-day motions? Is he aware of the intense public revulsion at the practice? If we cannot have a debate on that next week will he, as a former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, impress upon his colleagues who now go to the Council of Agriculture Ministers the need to change the rules so that animals that are due for slaughter on the continent should go there as carcases, not as live creatures?

Mr. MacGregor: That topic has been discussed several times and I cannot promise a debate on it next week, or in the first week that the House resumes. I am sure that there will be other opportunities to discuss that matter, which I know concerns many people.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on procedure, specifically in respect of the relationship between taxation and expenditure? In local government, it is not possible to make spending proposals without relating them directly to the revenue that must be raised. Many right hon. and hon. Members, and many others outside the House, are fed up with Opposition proposals which, although they may be desirable, are unachievable and take no account of the cost. Can we bring our procedures into line with local government in that respect?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, I very much share his view on the way in which the Opposition approach such matters. He will have an early opportunity to raise that subject, because we will have a debate on public expenditure plans not long after the House returns from the Christmas Adjournment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. Gentleman review his decision about a statement on the crisis arising out of last week's severe weather conditions? Is he aware that, in the east midlands, more than 100,000 people are still without electricity and that thousands are without water? I have just spoken to a farmer who is still attempting to rescue 1,000 sheep and 100 cattle from snowdrifts and who is also without electricity and water. Will the Secretary of State for the Environment and Secretary of State for Energy get together to ensure that proper safeguards are immediately introduced to force the electricity boards to get the job done, that compensation is paid to those who have lost thousands and thousands of pounds, and that local authorities have enough money to do their job properly?

Mr. MacGregor: I extend my sympathy to all those who were without electricity during last week's exceptional weather conditions and particularly to those who remain without a supply. However, the new regional electricity companies mounted a magnificent effort in restoring supplies. Fewer than 43,000 customers remain without a supply, and all but a few in the most remote areas should have their supplies restored by the weekend. Co-operation between the electricity companies has been most impressive. East Midlands Electricity has about 2,000 operatives from other parts of the United Kingdom working to restore supplies, which is a good example of the co-operation that I have praised.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for the Environment? Recently, there have been redundancies in the glass manufacturing industry that relate to insulation. Could we have a debate on home insulation and the possibility of restoring grants, which would not only help to keep people warm but keep people in work?

Mr. MacGregor: There are regular opportunities to discuss such topics and the Government have taken action on some of the matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I cannot promise a debate in the near future.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House encourage the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement as soon as possible on British Rail's proposal to close the Speedlink fast overnight goods service, which will put between 1·5 million and 3 million tonnes of goods on to the roads? Are the Government serious about reducing road congestion or will they allow British Rail to close that valuable service, which will create about 1,000 redundancies and increase congestion? That can be avoided at the cost of only about £30 million.

The Confederation of British Industry—which, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, is a Tory front organisation—complains that road congestion already costs Britain £15 billion a year. Is that Tory policy in action or will the Government do something—or at least make a statement to the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the CBI and the hon. Gentleman would be the first to agree that one must examine cost-effective solutions. The decision to close the Speedlink freight network from July 1991 is a commercial one for British Rail. A relevant factor is Speedlink's serious commercial losses of £30 million last year, increasing towards £40 million this year, on a turnover that is not much greater than £40 million.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his sympathetic response to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), but may I point out, with respect, that responsibility for the safety of mariners—including fishermen—rests not with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food but with the Secretary of State for Transport? None the less, I readily appreciate that a comment or two will be made on the subject during this evening's debate.

May I also remind the right hon. Gentleman that the last occasion on which the House debated the safety of fishermen at any length was in connection with a private Member's Bill presented by Sir Albert McQuarrie, the Safety at Sea Act 1986? Do not we need an early debate about the rules and regulations governing the occupational safety of the men who face so many physical and, I would say, man-made hazards as they go about their ordinary, everyday working lives?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that today's debate on fisheries matters is very important for the fishing industry. I hope that he agrees that, for the convenience of the House, we should reach it as soon as possible—taking into account briefly, as part of the debate, a statement on the tragic incident that has just occurred. I have already said that I will raise some of the other points that have arisen in connection with that incident with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): May we have an early debate on law and order? Earlier this year, a minor public figure was hauled before a Sussex court because of a story concocted by a former secretary and a known criminal, backed by the *News of the World*. The police have since admitted that the fingerprint evidence did not match the fingerprints of the defendant.

Clearly, that is an important issue. Moreover, the Government and the Crown prosecution service are trying to bring Desi Ellis back from Ireland—to extradite him, in fact—on the basis of alleged fingerprint evidence. Surely the activities of the Crown prosecution service should be debated at length. Many other issues are involved, including the imprisonment of a person who has not paid the poll tax—and rightly so. We have a law in this country, but surely the House should examine the question of justice in detail, preferably at an early date.

Mr. MacGregor: We have had many debates recently on law-and-order issues. Obviously, I do not wish to comment on the specific points and the specific incident raised by the hon. Gentleman, because it is not a matter for me and I do not know the details, but I do not think that it justifies a full debate on law and order.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Did the right hon. Gentleman hear the Home Secretary deliberately fail, or refuse, to answer a question about the Leicestershire police? In the circumstances, may we please have an early debate on the present dangerous circumstances? Not only is the police force undermanned, but it has run into a deficit of £1·25 million. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are deeply concerned about what is happening to policing in our county. This is not a party matter; we are all anguished by the lowering of the protection that people need in these times when the crime rate is soaring in Leicestershire.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not hear those earlier exchanges, and I do not feel that the matter justifies a debate in Government time.

The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that the Government meet 51 per cent. of all police expenditure through specific grant and also meet additional expenditure through the revenue support grant. I understand that it is Leicestershire county council which is unwilling to meet its share of the costs faced by the Leicestershire constabulary, which is why cuts are now required.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I press the Leader of the House for a statement next week on the Government's plans to help the homeless, which have just been announced by the Prime Minister? Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange, as part of that statement, for an urgent investigation of the cash crisis faced by the Bradford Cyrenians, which is threatening their ability to help the poor and homeless in Bradford? As Leader of the House, will he press the authorities to make Westminster Hall available to give shelter to the hundreds of men and women who are now sleeping rough throughout Westminster and who would also serve as a daily reminder to Conservative Members of the Government's failures in economic and social policy?

Mr. MacGregor: We have made several announcements about homelessness and the hon. Gentleman will know that an extra £300 million is targeted at London and the south-east to deal with that. That includes £115 million for the second year of the special homelessness initiative. Local authorities in London and the south-east will shortly be invited to submit bids on that.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman carefully consider asking his Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for Social Security, to make an early statement about the operation of the cold weather payment? Is the Leader of the House aware that, if Tory Members are not concerned, Labour Members are desperately concerned about pensioners who are unable to keep their homes warm? Is not it disgraceful that, in this day and age, so many of our retired citizens have to live in such conditions during the winter months because the Government will not provide assistance? We require an early statement; we do not expect pensioners to freeze before the House of Commons has an opportunity to discuss the matter.

Mr. MacGregor: No. We devote substantial resources to pensioners in all sorts of ways, and we have also taken action, when appropriate, on severe cold weather payments. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will continue to keep a watchful eye on events and take action, as we have done in the past.

Mr. Winnick: We want a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: As for a statement, we must wait to see whether we reach an appropriate moment for a statement.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Leader of the House look again at early-day motion 161 on reasonable hours?

[That this House notes the encouraging tone of the Prime Minister's reported remarks in the Mail on Sunday on 2nd December, relating to the introduction of more sensible hours and conditions for the House of Commons; and calls upon the Lord President of the Council to bring forward, after due consultation, proposals to effect such a change.

Will he welcome on a personal basis the Procedure Committee's decision to look at sitting hours early next year? If he chooses to submit evidence on the matter will he pay particular attention to the needs of hon. Members who travel from the north and from Scotland and Wales and how the arrangements can best suit them?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that I am considering how best to take forward all the representations made, and that includes what the Procedure Committee feels it should do. It has become clear from the way in which the debate has proceeded over the past few days, not necessarily in the Chamber but more widely, that there are many different points of view, depending on individual circumstances, not least the issue of where hon. Members' constituencies lie. All those issues will have to be taken into account.

The hon. Gentleman will know that this has been looked at several times in the past and that quite a few initiatives have been taken. I keep stressing that it is important for hon. Members to co-operate on all those initiatives, including those we are looking at now, if they are to be effective.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will next Monday's debate on the Criminal Justice Bill allow a comparison to be made between the maiden speech in the House of Lords yesterday of the former Home Secretary, Lord Waddington, on the need for the reduction of custodial sentences, and the sentencing last Friday of a 20-year-old unemployed man in Grantham for being unable to pay his poll tax? It has cost the state more in the past week to keep him in prison than the debt he owes.

If that is not possible, will the Leader of the House tell us when he intends to bring legislation before the House to bring English law in line with Scottish law? Two years ago —25 months, to be precise—the Government abolished imprisonment for debt in Scotland, so why is it that, in England and Wales, young people can still be put inside for the crime of being poor?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman frequently misses the point. I do not see how those issues can be raised in Monday's debate.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 223 on the electricity crisis in the east midlands, which has already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)?

[That this House re-affirms its deep concern for the plight of masses of people in the East Midlands who are still without electricity supplies five days after the arrival of severe weather conditions; notes that on 12th December some 250,000 people were still without electricity supplies and that under present arrangements significant numbers of these will be without electricity for well over a week before their supplies are reconnected; expresses admiration for the considerable efforts of hard-pressed electricity workers in their attempts to re-establish supplies; but condemns utterly the failure of the Department of Energy to either declare that an emergency exists or to move essential resources into the East Midlands to tackle the crisis; regrets that East Midland's Electricity has itself failed to ask the Department of Energy to take emergency action; and believes that this is due to fears of the impact that such a move would have upon the floatation and sale of its electricity shares.]

For five and a half days now, 100,000 people in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and generally throughout the east midlands have been without electricity. The Minister said earlier that 43,000 customers had no supply. A total of 40,000 of them are in the east midlands area. There is a massive crisis and people have been without electricity for considerable periods up to five and a half days, but it will be considerably longer before their supplies are reconnected.

The problem exists not in isolated rural areas but in conurbations. We should have a statement from the Secretary of State for Energy so that we can question him, or an emergency debate on an issue that is a crying shame. If we do not get that, we should get the resignation of the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that is appropriate, but I repeat that the regional electricity companies have been making superlative efforts to restore electricity supplies. I cited the fact that about 2,000 employees—relevant experts—from other parts of the country are helping to restore supplies to the east midlands. It has been a splendid effort by all concerned.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Will the Government find time for an early debate on science policy, given the severe cuts in prospect in Britain's science base and the declining support for industrial research and new technology, at a time when our competitors are increasing theirs? Of the past six debates on science policy,

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

only one has been in Government time, and that was as long ago as Friday 14 June 1985. Is that a fair reflection of the Government's pride in their record?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Government expenditure on science, in terms of public funding, has increased substantially in the past two years. It would be appropriate, therefore, to ask that question in a debate on public expenditure. We intend to have a debate on the public expenditure White Paper fairly soon, when it would be appropriate for the hon. Gentleman to make such comments as he wishes. I am sure that he will receive a sound and good response from the Minister.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week on large firms, particularly in the London area, that are encouraging their staff and officers to work illegally on the next two Sundays before Christmas? We have had numerous debates on Sunday trading and Sunday laws. Only last week, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), said:

"The law is the law . . . There can be no dining a la carte with the law of the land."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 325-26.]

There should be no dining à la carte with the law on Sunday trading. Will the Leader of the House ensure that we have a debate and that those who are irresponsible enough to ask their staff to work on Sunday are stopped by him and by the Government?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Shops Act 1950 provides that, in general, shops should be closed for the serving of customers on Sunday, except for the transactions listed in the Act. No exception is made for Sundays at any particular time of the year. Equally, the hon. Gentleman will know that we debated the anomalies that have arisen as a result of that Act but failed to reach a solution that commanded general agreement. The Government have made it clear that they are prepared to consider alternative methods of reform if they are practical, enforceable and likely to command a parliamentary majority—a precondition of a successful outcome. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the difficulties of finding an agreed way forward.

Consolidated Fund Bill and Christmas Adjournment

4.14 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment, which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Wednesday 19 December.

Hon. Members should submit their subjects to my Office not later than 10 pm on Monday 17 December. A list showing the subjects and the times will be published the following day. Normally, the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours. Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

I remind hon. Members that, on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday 20 December, up to nine Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the results made known as soon as possible thereafter.

Death Penalty (Amendment)

4.15 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is a simple matter. In answering the question raised by the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), the Leader of the House said that the amendment which stands for debate on Monday in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), myself and others sought to overturn the Treason Act 1790. That is completely untrue. The record should be amended to show that we seek only to change the penalty.

Mr. Speaker: Assuming that the amendment is called for debate, that matter will be debated on Monday next.

BILLS PRESENTED

WRITTEN CONSTITUTION

Mr. Graham Allen presented a Bill to provide for the drawing up of a written constitution for the United Kingdom; for its consideration by the people and Parliament of the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 47.]

HOUSING (HOMELESS PERSONS)

Mr. George Howarth, supported by Mr. Clive Soley, Mr. Joe Benton, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mr. Dennis Turner, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. David Clelland, Ms. Clare Short and Mr. William O'Brien, presented a Bill to establish a limit to the period during which homeless people may be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation to enable local authorities to make use of accumulated capital receipts in order to provide additional low cost housing for rent; to enable local authorities to finance private sector leasing arrangements for housing homeless people by restoring the provision for a separate allowance within housing revenue accounts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 48.]

ESTIMATES DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY] [1ST PART]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1990-91

CLASS IV, VOTE 2

[Relevant documents: Third report from the Trade and Industry Committee of Session 1989-90 on Company Investigations (House of Commons Paper No. 36) and the Government reply contained in the White Paper, "Company Investigations" (Cm. 1149).]

Companies and Financial Services

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £14,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1991 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection and administration. —*[Mr. Redwood.]*

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

4.16 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I beg to move,

That Class IV, Vote 2 be reduced by £10,000 in respect of Subhead K1 (consumer and investor protection).The Select Committee on Trade and Industry has carried out extensive investigations into the way in which investigators work in policing business standards. Rising at this hour of the afternoon, I almost feel that I should seek the leave of the House. This is the second time that I have spoken in the House today, having spoken after midnight last night. I hope that I do not trespass on your patience, Mr. Speaker, by speaking now. I trust that hon. Members will hear me as kindly now as they did then. My hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs, who sits on the Government Front Bench, had to endure that speech as well.

We are calling for a reduction of £10,000—I believe that it used to be £1,000, but it has been inflated to a more respectable figure. We want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the public are rightly worried about investigation standards and the qualities of those carrying out investigations on behalf of the Government in the Department of Trade and Industry and in the self-regulating regulatory agencies which result from the financial legislation of the past decade.

It is interesting to note that the increase proposed in the supplementary estimates is £2·7 million. Although that sum covers expenditure on several aspects, it reflects the rise to £9 million in 1989-90 from just under £7 million in the previous financial year. Even taking inflation into account, there has been a small, but important, increase in expenditure.

Hon. Members who supported me on the Select Committee and others wish to take part in the debate, and I trust that I shall not detain them long. I should like to concentrate on three items: who pays for investigations, who investigates and a particular investigation relating to the House of Fraser.

Who pays? It is interesting to note that, in 1988-89, the cost of the Department of Trade and Industry investigations was £6·2 million and the income from

[Mr. Kenneth Warren]

Companies house fees and charges was set to recover the costs arising from the regulation of companies, including the costs of investigations. Three investigations have principally dominated the headlines of the press. The investigation into the House of Fraser cost £1·5 million, the investigation into Guinness cost £1·6 million and the investigation into County NatWest cost £1·1 million.

The Select Committee recommended that more steps should be taken to recover the cost of investigation from the companies and individuals involved unless the inspectors found no evidence of wrongdoing. We persist in that view, and we do not expect those who have not erred and strayed to have to pay for those who have. We hope that my hon. Friend agrees that that requirement should be an expectation of Government and should be under review at all times, so that we ensure that those who have erred and strayed pay for their misconduct.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Can my hon. Friend explain what the Select Committee had in mind? Was it that the inspectors should make a recommendation about whether the company under investigation should pay the costs, or was it that the Secretary of State should make such a recommendation? Would not it be rather invidious to leave it to the Secretary of State? It might be better for the inspectors in reaching their conclusions to determine that matter.

Mr. Warren *rose*——

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): It is quite important that the Chairman of the Select Committee should not be asked what the Committee had in mind. What it had in mind it said in its report. Although any member of the Committee may give his own view, it is quite improper to ask the Chairman of the Committee what the Committee had in mind that it did not say in its report.

Mr. Warren: I am extremely grateful for both those interventions. One has ensured that I do not commit the Committee to something that it did not have in mind and the other has ensured that I am allowed to say what I have in mind.

In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), I must say that I do not mind who makes the recommendation as long as somebody does. If my hon. Friend wants me to choose, I will say that, bearing in mind the fact that we believe that the inspectors should come to conclusions, I believe that they should also come to a conclusion on the costs. However, I am prepared to be swayed on the matter in our debate.

Who investigates? The Committee was very concerned that it took a long time for the inspectors, who are the investigators, to be appointed, especially in insider dealing cases, in which it can take weeks or months. That response time is not in line with business needs. Business should not be held up if there are no problems, so one must get the answers as quickly as possible. The fact that weeks or months often elapse before inspectors are appointed is not acceptable in this country where the highest standards are expected of business and where the Government are expected to act promptly in response to the perceived problems.

We came to the conclusion that the right staff—there are many in the Department of Trade and Industry—need to be supported by more people from various professionally skilled occupations. It was good to see that the Government conceded in their reply:

"it would be desirable for a somewhat higher proportion of investigation staff to have full professional qualifications".

That is important. We have noticed in the past decade of inspections that too often we did not see inspectors reappear to help, so the Government and the public are losing the lessons that have been learnt. The learning curve for inspectors is always steep; they come into the job and they have to find out how to do it. It takes them a long time to acquire the internal expertise they need to carry out investigations.

I hope that it will be possible for the Government, and especially for the Department of Trade and Industry, to look at the calibre of the staff in the investigation service, and either to bring in more people or to encourage people within the Department to enhance their own qualifications so that the highest possible standards of investigation can be available at all times. Perhaps the Department could establish a panel of inspectors who could be on call so that there should be no delays such as those that we encountered in our review.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I am not endeavouring to probe the collective mind of the Committee, of which I was a member, but does my hon. Friend agree that, if we are to have the very best inspectors, they are inevitably people who are busy and successful in their own professions and cannot therefore spend a vast amount of time probing and fathoming things as my hon. Friend has suggested? That is another reason why it is important that there should be very good back-up, since otherwise we shall have second-rate inspectors or the inspectors will be deterred from carrying out that work ever again because it takes up so much time.

Mr. Warren: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why we hope that more inspectors will be drawn from within the Department, thus keeping the learning that has been acquired at public expense within the Department.

Let us consider the time that recent investigations have taken to complete. The 10 investigations in 1987 took an average of 14 months to be completed under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986. In 1989, 16 investigations were launched, of which seven are not yet complete, but the average time is already running at over 12 months. I know that it looks on the surface as if there has been more malpractice, but perhaps one could look at it the other way round and say that there is a higher quality of investigation in the Department. In any case, there is no shortening of the time taken in investigations. In saying that, I am not taking any account of the point that I made earlier about the time that it takes to appoint the inspectors.

I turn now to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) about the duties of inspectors. The Committee came to a firm conclusion, after hearing evidence from both sides, that conclusions should be expected from the inspectors, taking account of the evidence before them. We are pleased that the Government agree with that recommendation, because the inspectors must have an end duty in sight, which is what one would expect of men of the calibre required to take part in the investigation.

My last point on this area deals with the time taken by the investigations, to which I have already referred. In their reply, the Government said that they did not believe that it was wise to have time targets. The Committee was concerned that if targets were not set, the open-ended nature of the investigations would not concentrate the minds of the investigators in the way that we believe they should be concentrated. This is merely standard management practice, and I am sure that the whole Committee will stand with me in commending it to the House.

I refer now to the investigation into the House of Fraser. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that the then Leader of the House replied, in answer to requests from hon. Members of all parties about the publication of the House of Fraser report, that he had taken note of the fact that the Select Committee was itself carrying out an investigation. I drew his attention to the fact that we were not looking at specific investigations, but at the nature of investigations and the way in which they proceed with a view to making recommendations thereon. However, during those investigations and subsequent to the publication of our report in May this year and the Government's response to it three months later, we have been receiving further information on the subject.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the House of Fraser report was passed to several authorities in March this year. The Bank of England had received a copy earlier. Those who received the report besides the Bank of England included the Solicitors Complaints Bureau of the Law Society, the Securities and Investments Board, the Securities Association and the body with that most complicated title of all—the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association, or FIMBRA. I shall go through the last four in that group and return to the position of the Bank of England.

The Solicitors Complaints Bureau said in a memorandum which the Department of Trade and Industry kindly passed to the Select Committee that it recently received a report from the solicitors instructed by it to investigate the part played by Herbert Smith in the matters dealt with in the inspectors' report. I have been pleased to learn in the past few days that no evidence has been found of professional misconduct by that firm of solicitors. However, the time taken to carry out that evaluation is worrying. It took some seven months. It must cause considerable anxiety to a firm such as Herbert Smith, which is well known internationally, to know that it is under investigation. It was probably dealing with all sorts of contracts of major importance during that time, some of which may not have been placed with it while the investigation was proceeding.

I have no duty to speak on behalf of any firm, but it occurred to me that the time taken to investigate a company such as Herbert Smith is unduly long, particularly when the Solicitors Complaints Bureau—a professional organisation—has the duty to carry out that study.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): In view of what he just said, will the Member—

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Honourable Member.

Ms. Mowlam: I beg his pardon.

Will the hon. Member accept that one of the difficulties of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau in the report was over the distinction between a solicitor acting as a referee and a solicitor acting as an advocate and that that was part of the confusion? Does he have any views on that point which the Solicitors Complaints Bureau should consider?

Mr. Warren: The hon. Lady is right. I refer to her as an honourable Lady, and I accept her comment.

The Securities and Investments Board believed that it did not have much more to contribute on the matter, and I accept what it said for the moment. I am reticent to pass any comment because the Select Committee on Trade and Industry will have the pleasure of the company of members of the board as witnesses next week. I would not wish to dull the enthusiasm of any members of the Select Committee to hear the excellent questions that I am storing up for that occasion.

Turning to the Securities Association, it is good to see that, since the events leading up to the appointment of the inspectors, both Kleinwort Benson and Macarthur and Co. Ltd have been through the Securities Association's rigorous and vigorous authorisation process and that both firms are now subject to the principles and rules established by the Financial Services Act 1986. It is worrying that it took an investigation to bring them to that happy position.

I turn lastly to FIMBRA, before coming to the Bank of England. FIMBRA has told us that it is monitoring the position continuously—a nice phrase. But it is the regulator of only a small proportion of the business of Harrods bank.

The area of principal concern to me, and on which I believe that other hon. Members wish to comment, is the position of the Bank of England. It has had several inquiries by the Select Committee. We asked it on 21 March 1990 what action was being taken about Harrods bank following publication of the inspectors' report on the House of Fraser. There ensued an exchange of letters. The Governor of the Bank relied on section 82 of the Banking Act 1987 and told the Chairman of the Select Committee and, therefore, the whole Committee, in a letter dated 3 August 1990:

> "I am told by a senior counsel that I am at risk under section 82 if I disclose information concerning Harrods bank unless I am able to do so under one of the exceptions provided for in the Act".

Section 82 makes it a criminal offence to disclose information received under the Banking Act other than to people specified in section 84 or, under section 83, to others to enable the bank to discharge its functions under the Act—something with which you are immediately familiar, Madam Deputy Speaker. That did not satisfy the Committee. In response to my further letter of 17 October, the Governor replied that the legal advice which he sought did not cover whether the Select Committee could compel him to disclose confidential Banking Act information, nor whether in so doing he might be protected by parliamentary privilege. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) is much more adept at these matters than I am, and he will wish to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to comment on this particular area.

I have taken advice from those who serve us in this House, and I am told that, if the Governor gave the information to the Select Committee, his evidence would be covered by parliamentary privilege. On page 132 of "Erskine May", the general rule is that the House

[Mr. Warren]

"will treat the bringing of legal proceedings against any person on account of any evidence which he may have given in the course of any proceedings in the House or before one of its committees as a breach of privilege."

Whether the courts would entertain an action against the Governor for having given evidence contrary to the provisions of a statute, and how the House would enforce its authority if necessary, would depend on the circumstances. I hope that you would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, in the traditions of the House, it would be surprising if the House did not take some action in support of the Select Committee and its privileges.

I have not yet covered the powers of the Select Committee to send for persons, papers and records. Before embarking on any such matter the Select Committee would consider the consequences carefully. I speak for myself when I say that I hope that the Governor of the Bank of England will look carefully at his position. As, since before March 1990, he has had an opportunity to look at the situation relating to Harrods bank, it is high time that he responded on behalf of the Bank of England to this worrying matter, whether or not the bank and its directors, including the Fayeds, are trading in a proper manner as required under the Banking Act 1987.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Before my hon. Friend reaches the substance of the matter, may I ask whether it is not absolutely clear that the order of the House establishing the Select Committee gives the Committee power to send for persons, papers and records and that, in the light of the precedent of the moneylenders' case, the House enforces the order of the Committee to answer to the satisfaction of the Committee, not the House, such questions as it is pleased to put? There is no question whatever that the Governor of the Bank of England is not above the law of the land or of this House, but is bound to answer questions from the House. A judge who entertained a criminal proceeding against him in the light of that would expose himself to dismissal by a motion of both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Warren: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is perfectly correct. You will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Committee on which I serve as Chairman has many parts to it. I am the nicest of people and I am surrounded by elegant gentlemen, like my hon. Friend, who are of a much tougher calibre than I am and who express forcefully what I feel. It is hard to hold on to my job with such elegant advice all around me. We have yet to hear from our friends on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): My hon. Friend will recall that, in the section of our report that dealt with the House of Fraser, two main conclusions and two recommendations were made. Neither of the Committee's important conclusions was addressed in the Government's published response. Both the Committee's recommendations have been summarily dismissed by the Government in their response. Those of us who do not want that matter to be whitewashed, who are not prepared for it to be quietly forgotten—many regulatory bodies would seem to prefer that—are not happy that the House, or the Committee, should persist, pursue and prosecute it. Surely it is most unsatisfactory that such important conclusions and recommendations were not given the attention, or assent, that they deserved in the Government's response.

Mr. Warren: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who has summed up accurately the feeling of the entire Committee. I should draw to my hon. Friend's attention, however, the fact that, since the publication of our report, new brooms have swept through the Department of Trade and Industry in Victoria street, of which my hon. Friend the Minister is one, ably supported by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

If my hon. Friend the Minister has an opportunity to participate, I am sure that he will want to assure all hon. Members, and not just my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and me, that there is no cause for the concern that my hon. Friend was right to express. It is not right that this issue should drag on for ever in this manner.

I have sought to identify the need for constant public assurance that the United Kingdom regulatory system is of world class calibre. That assurance of quality must be the hallmark of the United Kingdom if it is to be the premier financial services nation of Europe. We cannot count on London, Bristol, Edinburgh or any other of our financial centres holding on to that premier position. Frankfurt is coming up fast behind, and it is anxious to establish itself as the major focus of Europe.

The Government must demonstrate that they understand that assurance is required today and at all times. The Government must recognise their duties, so that there is a constant assessment of the self-regulatory organisations' performance. Investors require such essential confidence in those organisations at all times. The powers of protection and vigilance must be sufficient to the task expected of the Government.

4.42 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) has, on behalf of our Committee, covered the specific recommendations in the report. I should prefer to make a few general comments.

No one really knows the full extent of financial crime committed here or elsewhere. The one thing that is certain, however, is that far too much of it is going on. On page 4 of the Government's response to our report, they make an apt comment when they say:

"The financial services area is a particularly attractive target for fraud, since its raw material is other people's money".

That sentence sums up the problem well, but it is a pity that the Government's response has, in general, failed to recognise that the problem is as serious as that sentence suggests.

It is clear that the development of information technology, which allows vast sums of money to be switched around the world in a matter of seconds, has made financial crime much easier. It is also clear that that crime is now committed internationally on an unprecedented scale. I fear that the villains are in front of the forces of law and order and are getting even further ahead, which is disturbing.

On 15 October, the House debated one of our previous reports on financial services in relation to the single European market. I contributed to that debate and the

Minister, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—I congratulate him on his well-deserved promotion—accused me of casting aspersions

"on practically the entire City and much of the corporate sector."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. 1020.]

Nothing could be further from the truth. I did not doubt then, nor do I now, that the vast majority of people employed in financial services are perfectly honest, and as anxious as we are to root out the criminals. That does not alter the fact, however, that such crime is widespread. I do not believe that the country is tackling it as vigorously as necessary.

A few weeks ago, before our debate in October, the newly appointed director of the Serious Fraud Office said that the cases under investigation by her office, or awaiting trial, involved sums totalling £1·16 billion. By any standards, that is not peanuts; such is the scale of the problem.

During our long inquiry, I felt that the cases that were coming to light represented a minority—the tip of a large iceberg. One of the problems facing the prosecuting authorities is the slow pace at which investigations proceed—the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye has referred to that. The most obvious recent example of that is the notorious Barlow Clowes affair, but there are many others. We are far too slow in proceeding with such investigations, and that creates problems for the prosecuting authorities.

Another problem that confronts those authorities is that, once the wrongdoer is caught and convicted, the courts often impose derisory sentences. We appear to operate different scales of penalties for different classes of offence, even though all the cases relate to dishonesty of one kind or another.

A few weeks ago, there was a press report about a member of a local authority who received a fairly lengthy jail sentence for fiddling his travel expenses to the extent of a few hundred pounds. When we contrast that with the sentences that were imposed at the end of the Guinness trial on some extremely rich people who engaged in serious crime involving millions of pounds, no one can pretend that there is any real fair play when it comes to court decisions. The public find that most disturbing.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: May I say that I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman?

Sir Anthony Grant *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. One intervention at a time, please.

Mr. Crowther: I am happy to give way again.

Sir Anthony Grant: I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but judges must take into consideration the length of time that people have been in agony or at risk because the case has taken such a long time to come before court. In those circumstances, much of the punishment has been suffered before the actual conviction. That fact, however, reinforces the hon. Gentleman's point that it is necessary for procedures to be speeded up. The Guinness case was far too long; it is an example of why justice should be speedy as well as just.

Mr. Crowther: I agree, and the whole Committee was unanimous on that issue. I hope that it will be taken up by those responsible for carrying out investigations and bringing matters to the courts.

Most alarming throughout our inquiry was the complacency, indeed inertia, of the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). From his laid-back attitude, one might imagine that there was no problem and that any difficulties that did exist were not worth bothering about. His attitude was exemplified by his almost incredible refusal to take any action against the people whose reprehensible conduct was graphically described in the House of Fraser report. It was almost unbelievable that no action was taken at the end of it all.

That general feeling that there is not a lot to worry about comes through in the Government's response to our report. It does not apply as seriously as it did to the attitude of the then Secretary of State, for the Government admit that there is a problem, but they are not taking it as seriously as they should, and I do not find in their response the sense of urgency that the Committee tried to bring to the attention of the Government.

I hope that the present Secretary of State will adopt a more realistic attitude. As a former Treasury Minister, perhaps he understands more clearly the need for absolute probity in financial dealings. I agree with the hon. Member for Hasting and Rye that, if the City of London is to retain its place as the greatest financial centre of the western world, those who besmirch its reputation by criminal acts must be relentlessly pursued and severely punished when they are caught.

4.52 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I cannot reasonably, in the short time we have for this debate, cover the whole spectrum of this immensely important report. I express at the start my disappointment that the new Secretary of State did not think that the response to this very major report which is being debated—which is not an Adjournment debate, to which a Parliamentary Secretary or Under-Secretary of State is the appropriate replier for the Government—was one that warranted his presence in the House. I think that is a matter of regret. I am bound to balance that comment by saying that I am equally disappointed that my colleagues on both sides of the House do not also regard it as a matter which ought to require their attendance in the House.

If you look, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the number of questions that there have been on the Order Paper in the last nine months on the matters covered by this report, I think it is a matter of shame that the hon. Members who asked those questions did not think it necessary to be here today to listen to, or participate in, this debate. This is not a matter of criticism merely of hon. Members or Ministers; it is of both.

I direct my particular attention to recommendations which I will read out. Number 23:

"We recommend that company law be amended to provide that (1) if inspectors report that directors have given false information to them, the Secretary of State should automatically apply to the court for their disqualification".

That has not been done in the case of the House of Fraser, where knowingly lying statements were made to the inspectors.

[Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

I am not a lawyer, but I have little doubt that the provision of the Perjury Act 1911, I think section 6, which makes it a criminal offence knowingly to make an untrue statement, which is materially untrue, before a court or tribunal, even though not under oath, constitutes perjury, where the person concerned has a duty to do so. I understand that in the case of the Al Fayeds, the only question which perplexed the mind of the Director of Public Prosecutions was the extent to which they had a duty to make the—untrue—statements which they made. But untrue they were, and that is known.

Whether the fate of a grandiose firm of grocers and haberdashers should be a matter of concern to this House I beg leave to doubt. That is not a great matter to us, however Harrods may describe itself. But it happens to embody a bank, Harrods bank, and the regulatory organisation for banks is the Governor of the Bank of England, and it is that to which I intend to turn my main remarks today.

For most regulatory organisations there is a Minister answerable to this House, or else there is a court of law. But here we have the Governor of the Bank of England who is the regulator of banks with very clear duties laid on him by statute, and among those are whether the persons running a bank or controlling it are fit and proper persons.

How it can be held that somebody who has lied in a major degree to a company inspector is a fit and proper person to control the Harrods bank passes my understanding. So the first thing that is relevant for us to consider is whether the Governor of the Bank of England, who was invited to give private evidence to the Committee but declined to do so, has discharged his duty properly. If he does not discharge it properly in the case of Harrods bank, are we—and we are the Select Committee on Trade and Industry upstairs, and we are Members of the House of Commons here in this debate—entitled to assume, or dare we assume, that he does perform those functions properly when the Government—the Minister responding to our recommendations—have given no satisfactory reply to our recommendations?

Why does it matter if a fishmonger, butcher and haberdasher with a bank attached has a corrupt ownership, because the corrupt ownership is also the shareholders? So in law the shareholders are not at risk except by the same corrupt ownership. It matters for this reason. The whole of that pyramid enterprise is enormously in debt, and its debts extend in a large degree to the weakest of the three great banks in this country, whose own stability is not out of question at this moment.

So if the Governor of the Bank of England does not discharge his regulatory duty properly in the context of Harrods bank, and the whole edifice of which it is part comes tumbling down because it cannot meet the interest on its enormous loan of debt, that has an implication—I would not want to say a fatal one because it probably is not a fatal implication—for one of our three great clearing banks for which the Governor of the Bank of England has another enormous regulatory responsibility.

The House of Commons has, and it uses as its instrument, the Select Committees which have grown up, first, since 1971; and then—since the then Government refused to put the Procedure Committee's recommendations for reformation of them into practice, it had to wait until 1980—since 1980 we have had the much stronger Select Committees, in which the House reposes its trust for examining not only Government but other bodies which control our nation, in a manner directly or indirectly responsible to Ministers, who in turn are responsible to this House. And that is why this debate is so important. It is important because the banking system of our country is different from that of the United States of America, which may shortly be in cascade collapse through lack of proper regulation. We have to learn from the lessons of other countries, and within the United Kingdom we have a very imperfect system of banking regulation—imperfect if the Governor of the Bank of England either does not read evidence sent and addressed to him by first-hand witnesses —not tittle-tattle—or if he ignores such evidence because he finds it embarrassing. If he will not respond to the Select Committees of this House which have power to take evidence in strict confidence, then to whom is he answerable?

Mr. Warren: I am sure that my hon. Friend would want to make it clear that as yet we have not sought to send for the Governor, but that we have the right to do so.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: We have communicated with the Governor. He has refused to give us information, and the moment of this debate was not of our choice. It was the choice of the Leader of the House, and I would have preferred it to have come later so that we could have had the Governor of the Bank of England, who, in response to our first inquiry, asked the wrong questions of his legal advisers. He did not ask whether he could tell the Committee the truth. He asked whether, outside the Committee, revealing information that we needed to discharge our obligations to this House would constitute a criminal offence.

This was not the question that the Governor needed to ask. I could have told him the answer to the question that was material: that proceedings in Parliament, which taking evidence from witnesses pursuant to the Order of the House most certainly is, are wholly outside the province of the criminal law of this country; and any judge who heard an indictment on such a matter and who did not throw it out as outside his jurisdiction would open himself to dismissal by both Houses, not because of amour propre. The Houses of Parliament today only exert their privilege not as it has historically existed but in so far as it is strictly necessary for them to fulfil the trust that the House has reposed in them. That is the restriction in which privilege today is applied.

Can anybody believe that inquiring why the Governor of the Bank of England does not use his regulatory functions against admitted liars running a bank belonging to and secured on an organisation of doubtful capacity to meet its financial obligations and in debt to one of our major banks is not a matter on which this House has the proper right to inquire in confidence? Then the only way to deal with the situation—I repeat to the Minister of State, since the Secretary of State is not here—is to raise it tonight on the amendment—a very rare one indeed—to the proceedings today.

I add for the information of the House that I have sat on the Select Committee since it first existed in 1971. Unusually, this Committee has always sat mixed. It has not sat Government supporters on the right, Opposition on the left, and then voted on party lines. One of the

greatest Chairmen under whom I have ever sat is the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). This Committee since 1971 not only has always sat mixed: it has always endeavoured to serve the House of Commons rather than the political parties from which its members are drawn. I wish that that could be said of all Select Committees.

In concentrating on the supervision of banking, which has to be one of the aspects that emerge from our report on company investigations, I do not wish to usurp the function of the Select Committee on Treasury and Civil Service. It is because in this case there is a bank which is embodied in a grocer, fishmonger and haberdasher that it comes within our remit. But if that—and here I rest my remarks—reveals a dangerous weakness in the control mechanism which is the personal responsibility of the Governor of the Bank of England, and he has declined either to justify his inaction or to report his action to the Committee charged by this House with supervising that immensely important aspect of our affairs, then he ought to call into consideration his own occupancy of that office.

5.9 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): First, I must declare an interest. I am the president of Manufacturing, Science, Finance, which has more than 80,000 members working in financial services. Secondly, I congratulate the Minister for Corporate Affairs on his promotion and look forward to his winding-up speech.

Thirdly, this is the first time that I have had the opportunity to follow my good friend the hon. Member for Tiverton, (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), to whom it is always worth listening. He has no interest of any kind to declare and is fearless and of independent mind. I do not always agree with his views, but I always listen to them in the Chamber or in Committee with great interest. All hon. Members have benefited from his forthright style in presenting his case. I agree with every word that he said about the Governor of the Bank of England. The Committee needs to ensure that the Governor appears before it and stops making feeble excuses and hiding behind legal opinion which, as the hon. Member for Tiverton has shown, does not stand up to scrutiny.

Like other hon. Members who have spoken, including the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), I shall refer to the House of Fraser. I am sure that you will be busy over Christmas, Madam Deputy Speaker, but if you can spare the time and have not already read the inspector's report, may I recommend that you do so because it is far better than any mystery novel. If a book were published containing events such as those that appear in that report, no one would believe that they had happened. The television serial "House of Cards" is more believable than some of the events that are recorded in the report.

The report is right in what it says about the people running the bank and the largest corner shop in the country. The report says that the Fayed brothers dishonestly misrepresented their origin, their wealth, their business interests and their resources to the Secretary of State, the Office of Fair Trading, the press, the House of Fraser board and shareholders and their own advisers. It is amazing that the Fayed brothers are still there.

The report has shown deep flaws in our system of company investigation and in the role of the Department of Trade and Industry in protecting shareholders, consumers and, not least, the public interest. After six years and six Secretaries of State, and despite the catalogue of dishonesty and deceit outlined in the report, it is clear that no action will be taken against the Fayed brothers by the DTI, by any of the regulatory bodies or by the Governor of the Bank of England. There could not be a clearer indictment of the system as it stands.

Perhaps I may remind the House of the history of this case. In 1984-85 and amid some controversy, the Fayeds acquired House of Fraser Holdings. That gave them not only the ownership of the largest chain of department stores in Europe but, as the hon. Member for Tiverton said, status as bankers through Harrods bank. As the inspector's report shows, since then the Fayeds have systematically lied about their circumstances to prevent the authorities from intervening.

In 1985, the Office of Fair Trading and the Department of Trade and Industry were deliberately misled by the Fayeds about their assets and business interests. Their claims that they had widespread international interests in a number of businesses have since been shown to be false. Their interests in shipping, construction, oil, banking and other areas were minimal and their claims did not fit the facts that emerged.

The assets of the Fayeds were tiny and could not have generated anything like the capital that was used in the House of Fraser takeover. That has been satisfactorily illustrated in the inspector's report. Time after time the Fayeds failed to give a proper account of how they financed that takeover. People could speculate about that, but I do not intend to do so. The claims made on behalf of the Fayeds by Kleinwort Benson and by Herbert Smith have also been shown to be untrue.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: False.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank the hon. Gentleman. False is a better word. There is a fine distinction in relation to Herbert Smith because it was not acting as advocate for the Fayeds at that time. We must take up the matter with the Law Society when it conducts an inquiry. Perhaps the House should return to the issue of how the firm of Herbert Smith discharged its duty in that respect. I am not completely satisfied about the way in which it was done. The hon. Member for Tiverton told me that what the Fayeds said to Kleinwort and to Herbert Smith was false.

The Fayeds' claim that they were worth several billion dollars was also false and they are not from an established family of Egyptian landowners. One genuine detail appears in the inspector's report, and it is about the conduct of Mohamed Fayed in the capital of Haiti in 1964. According to the report, he entered into a deal, using a false identity, to modernise the harbour, and subsequently absconded with up to $187,500 that belonged to the harbour authority.

Despite everything that we know, the Government have repeatedly refused to refer the takeover to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and have not sought to disqualify the Fayeds as directors. It seems to be acceptable to the Government to have proven liars and at least one proven thief in control of a major company, the

[Mr. Hoyle]

House of Fraser, and certainly in control of a bank. I am sure that that causes the Minister some concern and I shall listen with interest to what he says about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) spoke about the previous Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). From the beginning he was not only laid back but confused the issue in his statement to the House on 7 March. On the one hand he said that disqualification should be used as a means of protection for the public, and on the other that it should be used

"to protect the interests of shareholders."—*[Official Report, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 876.]*

Section 8(1) of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 allows the Secretary of State to apply for the disqualification of an individual when he considers it to be

"expedient in the public interest".

Under section 8(2) the court would then disqualify a director if

"it is satisfied that his conduct in relation to the company makes him unfit to be concerned in the management of a company."

In what sense can the public interest possibly be protected by taking no action? Why were not the courts asked to make their own judgment on the conduct of the Fayeds and their fitness to run the House of Fraser?

Even more disgraceful was the former Secretary of State's attitude when he appeared before the Select Committee. He refused to give reasons for his failure to take any action that would have led to disqualification. I still do not know why he did not go to court. That is still a mystery to me. He gave us no explanation for it.

The Government's conduct during the entire episode has been negligent. They failed to conduct a proper investigation during the takeover, and once the facts were known they failed either to refer the takeover to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission or to take steps to have the Fayeds disqualified as directors.

If we can have no faith in the Government's willingness to clamp down on shady business practices, we cannot have much more faith in the regulatory bodies that have been set up.

The hon. Member for Tiverton expressed the case exceedingly well in his forthright manner when he said that the Governor of the Bank of England has so far refused to come before the Select Committee. The Bank of England will not tell us what it intends to do, but it is obvious that it intends to do nothing.

The Securities and Investments Board has completely washed its hands of the issue. The Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association is waiting to see what everyone else will do. That is not its only failure. It also failed to act in the public interest with regard to the Levitt group where 18,000 investors are in some difficulty. In the light of what the Select Committee had to say about auditors, it is interesting that Levitt's auditors, Stoy Hayward, were also accountants for Polly Peck. It is a matter of great concern that FIMBRA has done nothing about that.

As I said earlier, the Law Society cleared Herbert Smith on the ground that it was a referee in the affair, despite the fact that it was used by the Fayeds to provide false information to the authorities.

It is perfectly clear that the structure of company investigations in Britain is a bureaucratic nightmare. Because there are so many bodies, the buck can be passed from one authority to another, and often the wrongdoers manage to slip away. We have far too many bodies and the knife should be taken to them. Their streamlining is long overdue. While we have so many bodies, it is not surprising that the crime that was described by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham is taking place to the extent that it is.

I hope that there will be some action on many of the Select Committee's recommendations. In particular, I would like a central clearing house to provide comprehensive co-ordination of the regulatory regime to be established without delay. The Department of Trade and Industry should more closely monitor the workings of the regulatory bodies and develop its own permanent staff of qualified investigators.

In addition, the broader public interest and the way in which it is applied should be more clearly enshrined in company law. Intermediaries should be under an obligation to ensure that they do not facilitate dishonest business practices. Finally, providing false information to inspectors should become a criminal offence and should lead to automatic referral for disqualification from directorship. That is essential.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham that we must not be complacent about the position of the City of London. That we are the greatest trading financial centre in western Europe gives me no grounds for complacency. We are looking at a Europe, whether we like it or not, in which the deutschmark dominates and the Bundesbank is becoming more and more powerful. Unless something is done to clean up our act, to clean up the City of London once and for all, in years to come the centre of financial dealing will move from here to Frankfurt or Berlin. Let us do all that we can to prevent that from happening.

5.27 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I did not have the privilege of serving on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry when it prepared its report. I congratulate the Select Committee on a comprehensive, extremely interesting and effective report. Having listened to my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) and for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), I realise that not having participated in those proceedings was a privilege forgone. However, it means that I have not formed any entrenched views on the matter of the House of Fraser, so I shall leave others to speak about that.

I want to focus my remarks on some of the Select Committee's other recommendations, in particular recommendation 21, which received a reply on page 15 of the Government's response. That recommendation says:

"We recommend that the DTI monitors closely the performance of the SIB and SROs in discharging their investigatory duties and reports annually to Parliament."

As the House will know, under section 114 of the Financial Services Act 1986, the Secretary of State has transferred most of his powers under that Act to the SIB, including investigations and enforcement powers. The Secretary of State has the responsibility of ensuring that those transferred powers are properly carried out.

I wish to address some remarks to the respective costs and effectiveness of self-regulation compared with statutory regulation, particularly as it applies to financial services. In particular, I want to refer to the Government's response on page 15. The Government clearly believe that the new arrangements under the Financial Services Act 1986 need a period of stability, to bed down and to demonstrate the Act's full effectiveness. That period of bedding down is fast running out. It will not be long before the Government must decide whether they are to introduce further legislation to amend the 1986 Act's operation, or should consider alternative solutions to the problems that remain under that legislation.

I do not want to see statutory regulation of financial services. That would result in substantial extra costs for everyone, which would affect the level of funding that we are debating tonight. Also, best business practice in the financial services sector is much more likely to be the route to satisfactory results than a legal jungle of the kind that is to be found in other countries, notably the United States. Having said that, it is essential that the work of FIMBRA, the SIB and the other SROs is made more effective. If that means providing them with additional funding through the DTI—though admittedly the SROs do not receive that at present—or, as *The Economist* put it recently, beefing them up with taxpayers' money, so be it.

I believe that the Securities and Investments Board is fairly conscious of the need to watch costs. I expect that, when its chairman meets the Select Committee on 19 December, he will show that the board is cost-conscious. There has been some misguided criticism of the SIB, with references to its luxurious new offices and its staffing levels, but much more important is the extent to which the board recognises when it is appropriate to deploy its full statutory powers in making an investigation, or when its objectives can be readily achieved by less formal and expensive means. Its judgment in that respect has generally been sound. However, I remain of the opinion that the SIB is not as effective as it should be—particularly in its relationship with the different SROs, and with FIMBRA in particular.

FIMBRA has some considerable operating strengths. I spent some time at its headquarters examining its procedures, and reached the conclusion that it has great strengths, particularly in the collection and collation of material about offenders and would-be offenders. That part of its operation is efficiently and carefully run, and secures most of the information it needs. None the less, FIMBRA remains a victim of its own rule book. In the public's perception, there is a gap between what FIMBRA should do and what it is able to do. There is a gap also between the point at which FIMBRA's responsibilities and powers end and those of the SIB begin, which gives rise to much misunderstanding and ambiguity. Consequently, certain practices have a tendency to fall between two stools.

That is particularly evident in cases where FIMBRA decides to terminate a company's membership. From that moment, FIMBRA ceases to have responsibility for the ex-member's conduct, and the SIB assumes it. In my experience, the board has shown some reluctance to pursue ex-FIMBRA members in respect of misconduct during their period of membership of FIMBRA, even though the SIB has responsibility for monitoring them. That gap urgently needs plugging.

There is something of a gap also between the SIB's responsibilities and those of the Department of Trade and Industry, which devolves to the board the bulk of its monitoring responsibilities. However, I know of cases in which, when a point has been put to the SIB, it has responded that it is powerless to act, or has passed responsibility to the DTI. But when the same point is taken up with the DTI, it argues that the matter remains the responsibility of the board. That is a nightmare for people pursuing important inquiries.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: It is unacceptable.

Mr. French: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is absolutely unacceptable. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to tighten up the lacuna between the DTI's responsibilities and those devolved to the SIB. Members of the general public and others wanting to undertake serious inquiries do not want to be shuffled off from one Government body to another.

I take the view that, in financial services, as in other consumer areas, the principle of caveat emptor remains extremely sound. That does not mean that the public should take a total risk. The public may be expected to do so in respect of the quality of an investment, and that risk cannot be removed from them. However, whereas one can make a judgment at the time of purchase about the quality of a pair of shoes, it is not reasonable to expect an individual investor to make a judgment as to whether or not the company in which he is investing his funds is honest and correctly administered. The individual investor does not have sufficient information on which to form a view and to make a proper judgment.

Nevertheless, if an investor is called upon to judge the integrity, honesty or administrative competence of a financial institution or intermediary, he should not be hampered in his attempt to do so by the presence of a FIMBRA imprimatur, as displayed in the literature or on the premises of the firm in question. Such an imprimatur, if it conveys anything at all, conveys the message that the company has been judged as honest and one with which the investor may reasonably do business. That is what the FIMBRA imprimatur conveys to the majority of the investing public: that the organisation's integrity has already been screened. When FIMBRA membership is withdrawn without proper publicity and public knowledge, as has happened, the investor is being perfectly reasonable when he protests that he thought that FIMBRA's stamp would provide him with some safeguard.

Mr. Tim Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend's remarks, but a difficulty arises because there is an expectation gap —I say that as FIMBRA's adviser. The FIMBRA imprimatur gives some investors the impression that they have a total guarantee, and caveat emptor appears to have gone completely out of the window.

Mr. French: I accept my hon. Friend's argument, and I should not want investors to imagine that the FIMBRA imprimatur provided them with a total guarantee.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: My hon. Friends have used the phrase "total guarantee". Can we distinguish between a guarantee against criminal conduct and a guarantee of profitability? If an investment yields no profits, it is a bad investment and the result of bad judgment. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French)

[Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop]

is making—quite rightly—is that FIMBRA membership should not be taken to relate to profitability; it is to do with policing against criminal dishonesty in the running of businesses.

Mr. French: That is exactly the point that I was trying to make. I would not seek to protect an individual investor against the investment ability of the firm into which he was putting his money; that is a risk that he must take. There can never be any guarantee in that regard: there will be good investment companies and there will be bad ones, and we must accept the position as it is. If the FIMBRA imprimatur is to mean anything, however, it should mean that a company is adjudged to be an honest company that administers its affairs correctly. At present, the public are confusing the two issues, believing that the one is the equivalent of the other.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Which it is not.

Mr. French: Which it is not.

If an investor loses his money in circumstances in which compensation is due, he will encounter significant weaknesses in the present compensation scheme. Since August 1988, under the Financial Services Act, compensation for a loss of up to £30,000 has stood at 100 per cent. It stands at 90 per cent. for a further loss of up to £20,000, with a maximum of £48,000. The scheme is run by a separate company, but financed by levies from the SROs. The payments, however, are not guaranteed: compensation will depend on the number of claims presented in any given year.

Thus, someone unfortunate enough to make his claim in the wrong part of the year, however valid that claim, may not receive the compensation that he might have received had the claim been made earlier in the calendar cycle. That, surely, is unsatisfactory: if there is to be a compensation scheme, it must of necessity be open-ended to the extent that it is not time-limited.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I have a good deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's arguments. Does he not agree, however, that difficulties are caused to people who may be faced with a bewildering array of investor compensation schemes? Those dealing with other bodies covered by the Financial Services Act —such as the recognised professional bodies—may find themselves in a very different position from those using companies covered by the self-regulatory organisations created specifically by the Act.

Mr. French: That is certainly a problem, and I think that much more clarification is needed. It may be simply a question of communication, but I suspect that it goes rather further, and that a tightening of the system will be necessary to enable people to understand fully the circumstances in which they would receive compensation and the precise source of that compensation. If that requires additional public expenditure, we can no doubt make savings elsewhere to cover it.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: My hon. Friend has taught me something this evening. I have studied the matter with some assiduity, but I did not know that the pathetic guarantee which replaced the £100,000 stock exchange guarantee, and which has not been adjusted in accordance with inflation and the cost-of-living index in the two and a half or three years since its introduction, tapered off as the year went by. Will my hon. Friend comment on that lack of indexation, and on the difference between the payment now made if a stockbroker defaults and the previous £100,000 guarantee—or was it an unlimited guarantee?

Mr. French: The compensation to which I was referring does not relate to matters connected with stockbroking firms; it relates to personal investors, and would apply, for example, to an investor who lost money as a result of investing with a FIMBRA member. Over a period, the compensation funds available run out, so that, at the end of the cycle, an investor may run the risk of not receiving the compensation that he might legitimately expect to receive earlier in the cycle.

Ms. Mowlam: The hon. Gentleman said that he would welcome the use of public funds if an increase in the scheme was necessary, and implied that he was sure that the Minister could find such funds. Has he any suggestions about where the Minister could find them—bearing in mind the fact that the Minister took the Barlow Clowes compensation funds from the budget for small businesses, research and innovation and the regions, as reported in the estimates?

Mr. French: I was not proposing to make any suggestion at this stage, although I shall have something to say about Barlow Clowes a little later. I do not believe that public funding is essential for such purposes; it is one solution, but it would also be possible, within the existing framework, to raise more funds than are currently raised through a levy on the SROs, which derive their funds from subscribing members. If, however, the money cannot be raised through an extension of the existing arrangements, I would expect a small saving to be made somewhere in the DTI's budget. In the context of that entire budget, we are talking about a very small amount of cash.

We see under subheading (k) of class 4, vote 2 that the figure of £156 million is listed for 1989-90, relating to

"Special payments to the Government's agents in connection with Barlow Clowes".

That sum does not need to be included in this year's estimate as the Barlow Clowes affair is now behind us, but I believe that there are other special cases that come close to being in the same category.

Let me cite a constituency-related case. C. J. How, a company that operated in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Worcester, was a FIMBRA member, and accepted investments from many of my constituents as well as those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Sir C. Irving) and, probably, others in that part of the world. Some of the investments amounted to £20,000 or more. The firm was suspended in April 1987 for failing to submit its accounts. In January 1988, its FIMBRA membership was formally withdrawn because of accounting problems, and at that point FIMBRA's responsibilities were ended.

The direct responsibilities of the SIB began in April 1988, which was when the relevant part of the Financial Services Act came into force. That meant that, between January and April 1988, the DTI was itself responsible for monitoring the affairs of this ex-FIMBRA member. By August 1989—some 16 months later—the DTI had stepped in and stopped C. J. How from running its

business altogether. It then became clear, however, that, in the intervening period—after FIMBRA membership had been withdrawn—particular categories of the firm's business had continued; that unit trust companies and life assurance companies had continued to supply it with investment products; and that investors had continued to invest.

One of the reasons for investors continuing to invest was that they had not been told about the termination of membership. Existing members reinvested and there were new investors because they did not know that C. J. How was no longer a member of FIMBRA. When asked about that, one of the reasons given by FIMBRA is that it has to restrain itself in the extent to which it publicises the withdrawal of membership in cases where there may be damage to the remaining part of the business that is unaffected by the withdrawal or, in extreme cases, where there might be a claim for defamation.

FIMBRA makes announcements in trade papers, but such specialist papers are not read by ordinary investors who walk down the high street. It is essential, when membership is to be withdrawn, that a way should be found to let potential or existing investors know about it. It should be more effective than now and should not involve any problems of defamation or damage to the rest of the business.

At the time of the withdrawal of membership, FIMBRA claimed to have no evidence of fraud or misappropriation. Clients were said not to have been complaining. At that time, no clients were seen to be at risk. However, in the event, many clients lost a substantial amount of money, and in that way it bears a close resemblance to the procedures in the Barlow Clowes affair. As the Barlow Clowes investors have received a substantial amount of compensation, as provided for in the estimates last year, at the very least the investors who lost money between January and April 1988 when the scrutiny of the company lay with the Department of Trade and Industry —it was no longer a member of FIMBRA, and the Securities and Investments Board was not responsible— the Department should accept some responsibility for the losses incurred, especially for those who invested in a company where the FIMBRA imprimatur was still in evidence.

I wish to comment on the remarks of the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and the remarks attributed yesterday—correctly, I hope—to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam). The hon. Member for Redcar said that the Levitt company—that seems to be on everybody's mind this week—raises serious questions about how FIMBRA does its job and what protection is being provided for small investors. I agree that it does raise those issues.

Some of the events in the Levitt story are extremely similar to those involved in the cases of Barlow Clowes and C. J. How. It is about time that we began to learn from experience. FIMBRA became alarmed during a routine inspection of Levitt when it discovered invoices of £21 million appearing apparently from nowhere. Presumably, in this case, it was to get funds into the company rather than the other way around. That is a substantial sum of money. One must ask whether the discovery came about from one day to the next or whether it evolved over a period. If the latter is the case, it suggests that more regular routine inspections by FIMBRA should be the order of the day.

FIMBRA declared itself dissatisfied with the company's accounting records. As the hon. Member for Warrington, North pointed out, it apparently relied upon assurances from the auditors of Polly Peck, if you please, that the client's assets were intact. As I understand it, FIMBRA did not make a formal announcement at that time because of potential effects on the liquidity of the company and the fact that it had no evidence of mismanagement or misappropriation of funds. Therefore, it kept its inquiry secret to avoid public panic.

As I understand it, and on the basis of press reports over the past seven days, even now the company has not been formally suspended by the SIB but, rather strangely, it has been "effectively suspended". Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can tell us the difference between those two terms. What is more, FIMBRA pronounced that it considered that client money was not thought to be at risk. That was only a few days ago, yet this morning one sees that there are projected losses of up to £40 million. I wait to see how those two positions are reconciled. It may be that the £40 million has nothing to do with client funds. We do not know. But I suspect that the two sums have been muddled up.

Mr. Warren: I have before me a document published this afternoon by FIMBRA, and I have no doubt that my hon. Friend would like to take it into account. It says:

"FIMBRA's newly-appointed Chief Executive . . . has praised FIMBRA's regulatory action in respect of The Levitt group Limited."

Is that not a little self-congratulatory?

Mr. French: FIMBRA's new chief executive has been in his job for only a few days or weeks. I suspect that he was not in post when the earlier investigations should have been taking place. However, I agree that that comment seems rather more casual than is appropriate in the circumstances. I look forward with great interest to reading the full statement.

One key problem in the case involving the Levitt group is that there are no specific rules about the way in which financial services companies recognise receipts from long-term contracts, particularly from insurance commissions. The receipt of such commissions may be spread over a considerable time, but they may be brought into account the moment the policy or instrument has been sold. The Levitt group has admitted that the commissions were put into its accounts when the contracts were formally signed. That provides no allowance for subsequent cancellation of investments which frequently occurs in that type of personal investment. Therefore, the company is cashing in on the commission before it is in the bag. This is fundamentally unsatisfactory and a proper rule to address the problem should be set out by FIMBRA or the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation.

Section 447 of the Companies Act 1985 provides that Department of Trade and Industry staff can investigate where they have grounds for suspicion of fraud, misconduct or failure to provide shareholders with information that they may reasonably expect to have. I believe that there is a significant lack of enforcement of those provisions. I want to give an example. I am thinking of cases that also affect the stock exchange regulations, where undertakings are given to repay loan stock at a date in the future but where nothing is done at the date of maturity.

[Mr. French]

For example, the Metropolitan water board 'B' stock was issued under the registration of the Bank of England in a prospectus going back as far as 1908. It was due for repayment in 1958. It was not repaid in 1958. The Metropolitan water board was taken over in 1974 by Thames Water, which was privatised in 1989. The flotation document contains a small paragraph on contingent liabilities, which says:

"Thames Water has been informed that a holder of part of the loan stock considers such stock to have been overdue for a number of years prior to the establishment of Thames Water Authority and that such stock is immediately repayable together with an additional amount of interest at market rates. The Directors of the company have been advised that the principal amount of stock potentially involved is unlikely to exceed £3 million."

That reference to £3 million is relegated to a small paragraph in the flotation document.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Was not that a rather economical statement by the directors? Should not they have said whether or not their legal advice was that that amount, however much, was owing or not?

Mr. French: My hon. Friend takes the words out of my mouth.

The loan stock holders who should have been repaid in 1958 have lost the value of that stock, which remains unpaid, and the interest on it. They have suffered from the fall in the value of the pound since 1958, which amounts to about 90 per cent. If all those factors are taken into account, far from it being a contingent liability of £3 million, it may easily be 10 times as much. If the fall of the pound is taken into account, it may be a further 10 times higher even than that.

Although I believe that that loan stock should be repaid, I accept that there may be some argument as to why it may not be due. But I cannot defend the failure to state clearly whether it will be repaid, and if not, why it will not be repaid. What hope is there for the small investor whose predecessors invested in that stock? Is he to take up the burden through the courts of reclaiming the amount that he believes to be due? If he is not to do so, could not he reasonably be expected to be told that he has no case? The position in the flotation document is ambiguous.

That situation is known to the Governor of the Bank of England—to the Treasury, to the stock exchange, to the directors of Thames Water, who are potentially, if not actually, in breach of the Companies Act, and to the Department of Trade and Industry. It has been known for some considerable time, yet no one has been willing to act. A regulatory system that permits that is inadequate and should be dealt with promptly.

6.3 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I hope not to take up too much of the House's time, but the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I am a member, has performed an important function in its report. As it is an all-party Committee, it gives the lie to anyone who might suggest that those who want vigorously and rigorously to pursue the problems of cleaning up the City are simply weevils in the great biscuit of capitalism and do not have the interests of the City at heart. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) made his views on the matter quite clear and I thoroughly agree with him. It is in the best interests of the City that all these matters, and the detailed matters referred to by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), are pursued with the utmost rigour.

It has emerged clearly in the debate and from the report that what should concern us is not the writing of a bible to explain the concept of due diligence or to file any amount of appendices, principles or sub-principles to clarify what obligations are owed to a client, but regulation, compliance and enforcement. My hon. Friends and others mentioned the problems at Harrods bank. I shall not refer to them because, bearing in mind the remarks of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), and as I have greengrocery in my blood, I should not wish it to be suggested that haberdashery and greengrocery were not equally honourable professions compared with banking. I venture to suggest to the hon. Member for Tiverton that beetroot will be boiled long after the last banker has been buried with whatever honours he or she may have deserved.

There is no doubt but that compliance is at the heart of the matter. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) on her efforts in exposing the Levitt group, with the result that this afternoon an arrest has been made.

It would be unfortunate and wrong to follow the hon. Member for Gloucester in attributing responsibility for regulation to one or two of the self-regulatory organisations or in singling out individual self-regulatory organisations such as the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Association for scapegoating. The structure of compliance is wrong, not the performance of an individual part of it. It would be unfortunate to single out FIMBRA—I have no brief for FIMBRA—because perhaps more than any of the SROs it has tried to let the world know about its regulatory activities. It has attempted to combat the difficulty that was referred to by the hon. Member for Gloucester—that in publishing the names of people from whom it has withdrawn recognition it leaves itself liable to subsequent action. None the less, its record in that regard strikes me as being at least as honourable as any of the other self-regulatory bodies and better than most. It would be unfortunate to think that the matter could be resolved by scapegoating the performance of any of the organisations.

Resources are of fundamental importance. Any organisation whose activities must be financed by levies on its membership will experience difficulty in exercising effective compliance if the resources that it needs to carry out the compliance effectively are drawn exclusively from those members. Budgeting for effective compliance is one of the great weaknesses of the system created by the Financial Service Act 1986.

The Department of Trade and Industry has no problem with resources because its compliance activities are financed from the surpluses or profits made from the Companies House agency. I think that last year those profits or surpluses amounted to £11 million. Oddly, far from there being a shortage of resources for public sector enforcement, a profit is being made from it. Plenty of resources are available.

Those who served on last year's Finance Bill Committee will recall the concession that was given to the City on stamp duty relief in anticipation of paperless trading. Many members of the Committee were staggered to learn that the relief of stamp duty meant a loss of

revenue to the Exchequer of £900 million a year. In that context, there can be no difficulty about finding public resources to beef up whatever system of compliance we may choose to adopt, whether it be a statutory one or one using the existing self-regulatory bodies. There can be no doubt about that.

The present system has limitations and weaknesses. When a crisis arises, there is almost an embarrassment of different bodies involved, all with a small corner of the action. This points up some major discrepancies between the course of action pursued by outfits such as FIMBRA, which attempt to let the world know what they are doing in pursuing their regulatory activities, and bodies such as the Serious Fraud Office and the Department of Trade and Industry, which operate on different principles and where the public's need to know is not so clearly recognised.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is an important difference between real and formal information? As my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) pointed out, advertisements in financial journals, which often people do not read, may exculpate someone in law for not announcing what he did. But if FIMBRA wants to let investors know when it imposes restrictions, it should issue that information to the popular press rather than just put a notice in financial journals that only financial advisers read.

Mr. Cousins: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but we should not lose sight of the fact that even the system of financial advisers that the City has may not be sufficiently effective in picking up these problems to circulate the information. Commenting on the problems of the Levitt group which had hit the newspapers, Tuesday's *Financial Times* stated:

"The accounts told a wonderful story of vaulting profits and turnover . . . but gave very litty indication about the way in which the figures were calculated."

It is clear that, given the system of auditing and accountancy, even insiders with expert knowledge find it difficult to comprehend the meaning of some published accounts. That point is recognised in the Select Committee's second recommendation.

We will not make much further progress on company regulations until we tackle the weaknesses of the system of accountancy and auditing. We must recognise the problems in terms of setting accountancy standards—which are reluctantly beginning to be addressed—and the practice of auditing. Auditing firms enjoy a monopoly on external auditing functions. The top 10 firms may possess enormous resources arising out of the fee income from their practice, amounting to thousands of millions of pounds a year. They are major businesses by any measure of size or practice and they wield enormous power. Their performance in the Polly Peck and Levitt group matters does not lend total confidence. Accounts are being exposed as practically meaningless, offering no protection to anyone. They have been beautifully prepared, filed and presented, but have turned out to be worthless. I hope that the Select Committee's recommendation will be pursued vigorously.

In defence of the existing SROs, I hope that those who apply to them for recognition—I hope that this treatment will be extended to the recognised professional bodies which existed before the Financial Services Act and which were caught up in its mechanism—in the conduct of financial business and who give false information will be subject to criminal sanctions in exactly the same way as people who give false information to the Securities and Investments Board.

I wish to return to the central recommendation in the Select Committee's first report. We must answer the following questions: what is a company and to whom does it belong? In British company law, a company is narrowly defined—it is the property of its shareholders and directors. We are now confronted with a new situation in which new classes of people are involved in a company's affairs, many of them indirectly through their ownership of life insurance or pension funds. The problems, opportunities and investments of those people are not recognised properly in the existing structure of British company law.

In a few years' time, we will be confronted with the problem of reconciling our company law with that of Europe, which operates on different principles. It operates in the Christian Democratic tradition—I put it that way because it may be more acceptable to Conservative Members—of social partnership in which workers, employees and managers are recognised as full partners who, through their labour, have a property right in the companies for which they work. Reconciliation of the European approaches to the question "What is a company?" and the traditional British one will trigger a wave of new approaches in company law and new company reforms.

Many of the proposals by the hon. Members for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) in the debates on the previous Companies Bill will be relevant to that reconciliation—the proposals for audit committees and two-tier boards and the proposals to increase the role of the independent directors accountable to specific social partners, to members of the social constituencies of which we must now recognise companies are a part. With those thoughts, I shall sit down in the knowledge that I shall give the hon. Members for Beaconsfield and for Chichester a chance to contribute to the debate.

6.17 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): In the short time left in the debate, I should like to make a few comments because my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) and all members of the Select Committee have done the House a singular service in undertaking this inquiry and bringing forward their report. Ever since the passage of the Financial Services Act 1986, the Banking Act 1987, the Building Societies Act 1986 and the latest Companies Acts, some of us have pressed for the supervisory process to be monitored more carefully and be accountable more regularly. Some of us said in the House and directly to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that we would like the Committee to do that. The Committee has done that job in the context of the report, and I am grateful for that. It is an interesting, positive and constructive report.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) for referring to the amendment that I and others tabled for debate on the Companies Bill. There is a strong case for empowering members of boards to have rights of auditing reporting and a separate statutory responsibility to ensure that the prudential management of company funds is discharged properly. Under our current unitary board structure, we

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

shall do that only by biting the bullet and empowering a specific body of directors to take that responsibility and not leave it to the voluntary processes, which are disregarded by many companies.

There is an on-going need for the Select Committee and for the House to supervise the supervisors. In that context, I was pleased to learn that the Committee intends next week to ask the Securities and Investments Board to appear before it so that it can inquire into the board's activities and into its discharge of its responsibilities under the Financial Services Act 1986. That is excellent news and follows the Government's response on ways in which supervisors can be held more accountable.

Other hon. Members have referred to Harrods and to the role of the Bank of England. I believe that, although, strictly speaking, the Governor of the Bank of England may have been correct in his legal interpretation of section 82 of the Banking Act 1987, it would probably have been a better judgment from all points of view if he had decided to appear before the Committee, if it had invited him to do so. I understand that the Committee has not asked the Governor of the Bank of England to appear before it because the bank has submitted a memorandum in answer to a number of questions and has sought to explain why, for legal reasons, it is not willing to go far in answering the questions that the Committee might put.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on the Banking Bill. It was clearly not the intention of the House or of that Committee that we should not be able to obtain essential information about the supervision of the banking system. Although it is said that the House of Commons was not expressly mentioned as one of the exceptions to section 82, I believe that it would have been a better judgment for the Governor of the Bank of England to be more forthcoming. We share the objective of trying to ensure the protection of depositors' funds. Confidence is involved in this and the Governor of the Bank of England could have been rather more forthcoming.

Mr. Crowther: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nelson: No, as time is limited and I have a lot more to say.

In recommendation 2, the Select Committee suggested: "the permission for auditors to disclose confidential information to the supervisory authorities should be raised to the level of a statutory obligation."

The House has considered that from time to time, but the Government have been reluctant—as they are again on this occasion—to raise that obligation to more than a moral one. That is probably right as the present improved procedures for reporting are satisfactory. However, there are still shortcomings and the way in which they should be overcome is not, as the Committee suggests, by raising the obligation to a statutory level, but by doing exactly what I proposed during the passage of the Companies Bill.

We should have audit committees for public limited companies above a certain size. If we brought that about, we should prevent autocratic and powerful chairmen or chief executives of public limited companies being able effectively to defraud the shareholders and to misuse funds under their control. At present, many non-executives in such companies are placemen—appointees of the chairman and the chief executive. They are yes-men on the unitary board. We must find a way to embolden them and to reinforce their ability to bring to account directors who might subvert or covertly misuse funds that are not theirs. As directors of public companies, they are trustees for the shareholders, for the creditors and, to some extent, for the employees.

Non-executives should be given a statutory responsibility and a statutory ability to inquire about substantial movements of funds within a company. There should, through the audit committee, be a separate reporting requirement from that of reporting to the auditors. We should insist that all the non-executive members of the board—and not the other members—say at each annual general meeting, "Yes, we certify that the auditors have been to see us. We have asked whether there are any unusual movements, capital flows, disbursements or payments that do not fall within the articles of association as we understand them. We are satisfied with the answers that we have received. If we were not satisfied, we should have brought them to the attention of the board." That would not change the course of events, but the matter would be flagged if there were a statutory requirement that at every annual general meeting there must be a report that the responsibilities have been discharged.

The Department of Trade and Industry has always believed that it must not separate the responsibilities of directors of the board. However, we now face the problem of leverage buy-outs in which massive amounts are involved. Companies nowadays are vulnerable to the misuse of funds or to being defrauded by particular individuals. We live in changing times. We must amend our company law and our supervisory structures within companies so that we can flag the problems far earlier and thereby prevent many problems happening. That major change will come about, although it may require a bear market and some more disasters first.

Apart from that omission, we now have a sound and effective supervisory structure. If we can bolster that structure from time to time through the discriminating scrutiny of the House, as the Select Committee has done, it will be all to the good for the corporate sector and we shall be discharging an important parliamentary responsibility.

6.26 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and all the members of the Committee on producing a comprehensive report on company investigations. The report is worthy of examination, although I am not saying that I agree with the Committee's conclusions.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) that it is welcome news that, next week, the Select Committee is to take evidence from the Securities and Investments Board. When we discussed the structure of the regulatory regime under the Financial Services Act 1986, we were clear that the board was to be accountable through the Secretary of State to Parliament. Parliament has a duty to examine every so often the activities of the SIB and to look at the annual report and accounts. I am not quite as complacent as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) is about the costs, and the Select Committee may want to ask a few questions on that. The SIB does not have the same direct pressure on it as the underlying self-regulatory bodies have

from their members to keep costs down. However, under the Companies Act 1989, the SIB now has a statutory duty to ensure that it delivers regulations that are not merely effective, but cost-effective.

I began working in the City at the beginning of January 1966—almost a quarter of a century ago. Since then, there have been many changes in the City—most of which, I believe, have been for the better. The changes were most notable in the 1980s, when the City became one of the three pre-eminent financial centres of the world, along with Tokyo and New York. That occurred because of the Government's deregulatory moves during that period, which attracted banks and others from all over the world to the City of London. Today, the City of London is pre-eminent not only in banking. The Baltic exchange remains the centre of the shipping business and of the insurance business. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) mentioned accountancy firms, which are very successful, do a great deal of business overseas, and contribute substantially to our invisible exports.

When we discuss regulation and the important matter of the protection of investors, we must remember that we do not want to over-regulate and thus drive business away from the City. We must find the balance between the two policy objectives. I believe that, in general, we have it about right and that we should not go too far down the road of additional burdens of regulation.

The other thing that has changed radically in the past 10 years has been regulation itself. Five to 10 years ago, many of the businesses that we have been discussing would have been wholly unregulated. Many of the members of the Financial Intermediaries, Manager and Brokers Regulatory Association still object to the fact that they are subject to regulation. They still find that difficult to accept. Firms of accountants and solicitors have been regulated for many years by their own organisations but, until April 1988, there was no organisation to regulate many of the small financial services businesses. Many are literally shops in the high streets, which offer insurance and other financial services products. They are still getting used to the idea that, in the 1990s, they have to pay a price if they wish to offer financial advice, and especially if they are taking clients' money and investing it on their behalf.

There can be no objection to such regulation. I am a supporter of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the structures that we established under its provisions. Although I understand the frustration of my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Finch) about its failures and weaknesses, given that this system is so new and has been such a radical change, I believe that we should not make any more major changes until FIMBRA has had an opportunity to prove itself. After all, changes were made as recently as the Companies Act 1989. They were designed to introduce a simpler form of regulation but many of them have yet to work through the system. We should allow them to do so. Two of the SROs—the self-regulatory organisations—are about to merge, which will produce a more efficient system.

We have also seen the establishment of the Serious Fraud Office. We should not underestimate what it is doing at the moment. I went to the SFO about six weeks ago and found it a most impressive operation. We did not have a Serious Fraud Office before, and the responsibility for dealing with serious fraud was widely spread across the different police forces. Today, all the major fraud cases are dealt with by people of the highest calibre. I am glad that the SFO now employs a few accountants who can get to grips with balance sheets. Although my hon. Friends may not believe it, that was a major deficiency previously, because the police did not have an adequate number of people who were sufficiently numerate to cope with major fraud. The SFO also has impressive information technology systems.

Although it would not be appropriate to go into too much detail, I recommend any hon. Member who is interested to visit the Serious Fraud Office to see what it is doing and the way in which it is preparing evidence for the trials that are due to take place next year. As I have said, it is an impressive operation, but perhaps more resources need to be devoted to it. It has an outstanding head in Mrs. Barbara Mills, who is an excellent appointment. There is no doubt about the SFO's determination to get to grips with serious fraud. We should not underestimate its deterrent effect. The way in which it has dealt with Polly Peck, for example, will send a message to many other people who may be contemplating breaking the law. They will see that we really mean business about fraud, and that we mean to get to grips with it.

I commend what the Government have done, both in terms of the Financial Services Act and in combating fraud.

6.32 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I agree with much of what has just been said by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who is an adviser to FIMBRA. The mergers between the SROs are an efficient move, and the Serious Fraud Office is efficiently run by a woman. I have no difficulty with that at all. However, the hon. Gentleman cannot have his cake and eat it. He cannot argue on the one hand that he can understand the frustration of FIMBRA members who do not want to be regulated, while listening to the tale of woe told by his hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), whether that relates to C. J. How, Hamilton House, Dunsdale Investment Group, Barlow Clowes or Levitt. We have a serious problem on our hands. Although there may be a need for parts of the system to bed down, there is also a need for the system to be adapted to respond more quickly, efficiently and directly to some of the problems that we are facing.

I congratulate all members of the Select Committee on what seems to have the general agreement of the House as being a strong and positive report, which has proved useful to hon. Members of all parties. In view of the time constraints, I shall not refer to the House of Fraser because the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and my hon. Friends have discussed it in detail. Looking back to our debate on the House of Fraser, we can see how —let us be honest—the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), hid behind the legal framework and the responsibilities of the Attorney-General. The Governor of the Bank of England is now hiding behind legal opinion. There is some similarity between those two examples in terms of trying to halt the truth and the facts coming out, and action being taken.

Much of the Select Committee report deals with insider dealing. The Government's response in their White Paper has been minimal although they have gone through a

[Ms. Marjorie Mowlam]

process of consultation. I hope that if the Minister has the time, he will tell us some of the results of the consultation process. I should like to hear some evidence about what the Government will do in terms of insider dealing. That was well researched by the Select Committee and there is no doubt that problems still exist. The stock exchange "Quality of Markets Quarterly Review", summer 1990, outlines the extent of the problem. Of the 103 cases that the stock exchange referred to the Department of Trade and Industry, there have been 42 investigations, resulting in only nine convictions. It is worth pointing out that those convictions cover only the small fry. In the United States, where the markets are similar, the people at the centre of the trading are being caught, but it is a different story here.

The DTI's confidence to deal with insider dealing is still very low. The report of the accountancy firm Ernest Young states:

"Over 90 per cent. of people have little or no confidence in the ability of the DTI to deal with fraud of just £10,000."

That confidence increases as the amount of money involved increases, but it never gets higher than 60 per cent. of people feeling confident that the DTI will deal successfully with insider dealing.

We have stated our policy proposals on insider dealing. I am sure that the Minister is aware of them——

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood) *indicated assent.*

Ms. Mowlam: Yes, but I have a copy of our proposals for the Minister if he has not seen them. We have gone into the matter in some detail. Like the Select Committee, we recommend a number of things such as the introduction of civil law sanctions—as well as criminal sanctions—against insider dealing. We want the criminal law—the Insider Dealing Act 1985—to be simplified and to deal with unpublished price-sensitive information. We do not want it to be a question of only the published price-sensitive information and of whether the authorised person—the tippee—should be named or the provisions should apply simply to an authorised source.

I agree completely with what the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said about non-executive directors and giving them an auditing function. That is a positive suggestion. However, he implied that that would contradict the auditors' statutory responsibility to report. I do not accept that. I should like to see the two auditing functions. We have recommended that auditors should have a statutory obligation to report suspected fraud in a company.

We have also made some suggestions about insider dealing and company fraud at the international level because much work could be done, especially with the United States and Japan and, to a certain degree, with Switzerland, with which we do not have even the mutual MOUs that we have at present with our European neighbours.

I am still disappointed, having read the White Paper, that the Government are not willing to have a centralised database. That should be a basic starting point, which should be expanded internationally as the markets move more globally. We would support such a proposal.

I shall concentrate my remaining time on the wonderful understatement on page 7 of the Select Committee's report:

"Fraud within companies . . . appears to have increased."

That is indeed an understatement when one considers the frauds that have taken place since the enactment of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the publication of the Select Committee's report. I seem to have spent most of the short time that I have been doing this job dealing with fraud and responding to statements on fraud. I assure the Minister that I have not done so willingly. I would rather consider the relationship between the City and industry and what we can do to help our manufacturing industry. I would much rather spend my time looking at what we can do in relation to the City and Europe. I wish that I did not have to come to the House, as happened on 7 March in relation to the House of Fraser, to deal with fraud.

I remind the House of what another Minister said on 7 March—incidentally, Ministers seem to change as quickly as Government statements—when I asked him why the Government did not investigate the allegations in more depth and why they did not fulfil their responsibility to protect the public interest. I asked:

"Will he insist that those lessons"—

I was referring to the lessons of the House of Fraser case—

"are acted upon by the regulatory bodies"?—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 874.]

The Minister made absolutely no response to those questions and, as many hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, the Government have done nothing since about the House of Fraser.

The hon. Member for Gloucester pointed out the similarities between the alleged fraud at Levitt and the case of Barlow Clowes. On 13 June 1988 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude), who was dealing with the matter, said:

"I of course confirm that the interests of investors are our highest priority, and that we shall do all we can to safeguard them."—[*Offical Report*, 13 June 1988; Vol. 135, c. 28.]

It will be interesting to find out what the Minister or his successors have done to ensure that investors are the highest priority and to safeguard their interests.

In October 1988 the next Minister said:

"The Government have acted to correct those weaknesses in the Financial Services Act 1986, whose main provisions came into effect in April this year."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1988; Vol. 138 c. 106.]

Clearly, if they had done so, the problems that we have faced since with Hamilton House, Dunsdale and Levitt would not have occurred. That suggests that we have had statement after statement from Ministers at the Dispatch Box talking about dealing with fraud and investor protection, but doing very little. When will the Minister make some specific points about company fraud and insider dealing?

The case of Levitt is a good example of fraud, which was related to the Select Committee. It has been mentioned several times. The Select Committee deals with fraud and what the Government's response should be. I shall understand if the Minister does not have time this evening but, in both the case of Levitt and other cases as the Select Committee report states, it would be useful and in the interests of both the broader public and investors if the Minister could answer some of our questions.

There is a great deal of confusion about whether the Department of Trade and Industry has set up an inquiry on Levitt. Some newspapers say yes and others no. When one phones the DTI it says, "No comment." It would be useful for the public to know what response the

Government have made, especially as FIMBRA was in Levitt back in October. One would have thought that even the DTI would have had time to make a response.

It would be useful if the Minister told us about the nature of the fraud, the amount of money involved and where the £21 million or £20 million has come from. If it is borrowed money, clearly whether that is a printable asset is called into question. The problems faced by investors may be even greater if that £20 million is already set against other assets.

In response to my earlier intervention, the Minister indicated from a sedentary position that it was not the case that the money was borrowed. If, as in the case of Barlow Clowes and C. J. How—which was raised this afternoon—compensation is needed, where will the money come from? The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that the money came from a supplementary estimate and £80 million came from industrial budgets for the regions, education and training, and research and innovation. That money went to compensate investors in the case of Barlow Clowes. When, on 19 December 1989, the Secretary of State told the House that the cash would be made available to pay compensation, he did not make it clear where it could come from. The budget headings that I mentioned were down 15 per cent. without taking inflation into account. We suggest that that is where the money came from.

It would also be useful if some of the other people involved in Levitt made statements about what is happening. There are several well-known directors. Mr Sebastian Coe, who hopes to join us in the House, is one. I am sure that he will not run a mile, or at least a quick mile, at the thought of making a statement. As the Select Committee report said, we need more information in the broader public interest. In the case of Levitt one hopes that other directors will come forward and take their responsibilities seriously. They should state the position as they see it.

My penultimate point about Levitt is that it is not simply a case of people having invested in Levitt. It seems that the number of small investors is small. The main investments were by four of the larger insurance companies and 70 per cent. of Mr. Levitt's own money was invested. However, there is anxiety about whether the money of the 18,000 investors who have insurance policies or left funds to Levitt to manage in a discretionary fashion is safe. That is the question that many people are asking.

I have here a large file of letters that I received from constituents about Barlow Clowes. It does not include letters that I received in my role as an Opposition spokesperson on trade and industry. I am worried that if the problems that the Levitt case will cause are as great as many people suggest, several Members of Parliament will receive many such letters from Levitt's investors. It is incumbent on the Minister to make the position clear to small investors who are worried about their future and the fact that they may come out with neither a life insurance policy nor the money that they paid into it. That is the anxiety of Opposition Members.

In the week of the electricity privatisation, when Ministers have encouraged wider share ownership, it would be useful if the Minister could make a statement about the success of the wider share ownership programme. The "Quality of Markets Quarterly Review" of the stock exchange shows that in 1981, not long after the Government came to power, 28·2 per cent. of the share of United Kingdom equities was held by individuals. That has now fallen to 18 per cent. Does the Minister consider that the Government have been successful in promoting wider share ownership?

Again I congratulate the members of the Select Committee on producing a good report. I ask the Minister to allay some of the fears of many small investors who have life insurance policies with Levitt and people encouraged by the Government to move from SERPS into private pensions, on which Mr. Levitt took 50 per cent. up-front commission, who are worried that they may have no pension scheme. Those investors are worried and want reassurance from the Minister.

What have the Government done about investor protection, whether in the case of Levitt, Dunsdale, Hamilton House or Barlow Clowes? As both Conservative and Opposition Members have said today, the financial services system does not protect investors individually, it is costly to the industry and could cost us more as we go into Europe. It is a cumbersome, inefficient system which does not work in the interests of the people whom it set out to protect. I should appreciate a response from the Minister on that point.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I shall begin by responding to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam). There has been an arrest today in connection with the Levitt group. The police are making inquiries and are working with the Serious Fraud Office, which is investigating the whole matter. That is a sign that the regulatory authorities have moved swiftly and acted with purpose. The question of compensation may arise. As the hon. Lady is aware, most people invested through the company in the form of life insurance policies. They are advised to check with their life insurance company that the documents which they hold relate to a valid, current policy. If not, they should approach the liquidators direct because, of course, the group has been put into liquidation. If there proves to be a shortfall, the compensation scheme provided for under the Financial Services Act 1986 may be called upon. Decisions on that scheme are made by those who run it.

The hon. Member for Redcar and her colleagues seem to believe that they have a perfect mechanism for abolishing crime. Yet when they were in government for five years they did precious little to amend or strengthen the law on financial services even though they had every opportunity to do so. They certainly did not abolish malpractice or crime during that period. Now they sit like second-rate vultures about to swoop on any company in difficulties where they think that they might pick up a scrap of political advantage. That does nothing to help the City of London or to ensure that it retains and improves its position as one of the world's big three financial markets. Its reputation is high and the Government's actions are designed to improve and strengthen that reputation.

The hon. Member for Redcar asked me about insider dealing. We have been consulting on it and are examining the replies to determine what type of legislation will be required to implement the directive and respond adequately to the consultation.

We are improving our record on tackling insider dealing compared with that of our neighbours and partners and compared with experience. The House might

[Mr. John Redwood]

like to know that Italy and Germany still have no operational insider dealing laws. France, which has an insider dealing law, has brought two cases to a successful conclusion since 1983. We have had longer experience of insider dealing law. Between 1980 and 1985 some five cases resulted in three convictions. In the past two years, the pace has quickened with 10 cases producing five convictions. The stock exchange is also bringing cases under its own aegis. Under the Labour Government there were no cases and no convictions because they did not think it sufficiently important to introduce a law to make insider dealing a criminal offence. That shows the difference between the two sides in how seriously we take the issue and the action that we adopt to make progress towards a clean, open and honest City.

Those actions have been bolstered in other areas. In the first six months of this year, following DTI reports, there were 26 winding-up petitions and 12 defendants were convicted on criminal charges other than insider dealing. That illustrates that we are serious about rooting out crime. We shall continue to do so with all the forces at our disposal.

Ms. Mowlam: The Minister is factually incorrect. Cases of insider dealing were dealt with on the stock exchange before 1980. Since 1970 Germany has had a strict code on irregular dealing on its stock exchange.

Mr. Redwood: There were no cases of criminal law prosecutions for insider dealing because there was no such law and the hon. Lady well knows it. She is trying a silly dodge to cover a glaring mistake in the Labour Government's conduct when they were in office in the mid-1970s.

In the first half of this financial year 111 cases were accepted by my Department for confidential Companies Act investigation. That is a major increase on the 68 for the same period in the previous year. It shows that we are taking to heart our duties to follow up those cases that seem suspect and to initiate inquiries where we are concerned about what is going on. In that period we completed 83 investigations compared with 62 in the same period the previous year. Those confidential inquiries often result in matters that need following up either by bringing criminal charges or, more normally, by tough regulatory action. Over half the cases that we investigate lead to such courses of action as a result of findings.

I, too, am grateful to the Select Committee for its hard work in producing this valuable report. We have responded at some length in the published documents before the House, so I shall confine my remarks to those made during the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), who conducted the inquiry with such skill, asked about the pursuit of costs arising from investigation and prosecution work. The Government intend to pursue costs wherever possible and the Companies Act 1989 included proposals to facilitate that process. The award of costs lies with the courts. It is for the prosecutors to make the best possible case where people or even companies are found guilty of malpractice. I promise my hon. Friend that we shall pursue costs wherever possible. I agree that where malpractice and criminal deeds are proven, it is a good idea to recoup some or all of the costs of the prosecutions and investigations through the courts.

My hon. Friend asked me about the time taken. I agree that it is important to conduct investigations with all due speed, but they must also be thorough and fair, and to ensure that they start on time if the matter is time sensitive. There have been dramatic improvements on the not very satisfactory position of some years ago. For example, between 1980 and 1984 investigations involving outside inspectors took on average five years and one month. Between 1985 and 1988 the figure came down to one year and eight months. We aim to improve on that again, as my hon. Friend would wish.

Timetables are common practice when we consider how to proceed with these investigations. The Committee thinks that we can work more swiftly on insider dealing. The average time to make appointments is four weeks. We set targets and no target has been set for longer than six months to complete an inquiry. Obviously, we cannot guarantee that every inquiry will be completed within six months because sometimes there are difficulties in pursuing evidence which take time to surmount.

Several hon. Members asked about the House of Fraser. I am glad that my hon. Friend praised the Securities Association for doing a good job pursuing its regulatory responsibilities with the banks and advisers concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) in particular asked about the Bank of England's action. That is a matter for the bank and it can be raised with the Treasury. I shall ensure that the comments made by my hon. Friend and other hon. Members are relayed to the Governor of the Bank of England so that he can see the substance of this debate.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye that our aim is that London should be the key financial centre in western Europe and one of the big three financial centres in the world. The Government's actions are geared to achieve that. We have an important role to play.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) said, most fairly, that most people in the City were honest. That was a welcome contribution with which I entirely agree. He made a plea for faster investigations and asked for tougher sentences. He will see on reflection that the Government's legislation allows considerable scope for tough sentences to be meted out by the courts. It is not for me, a Minister of the Crown, to go into the individual sentencing decisions of individual courts. Those with an interest in these matters in our legal system will see his comments and his reasons for wanting tougher sentences.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) is keen for my Department to monitor regulators. That is exactly what the Secretary of State and I do. We have regular discussions with the Securities and Investments Board which is, indeed, charged with the task of overseeing the work of the self-regulatory organisations. The hon. Gentleman has my assurance that we shall continue to monitor and examine carefully the progress that is being made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) asked about the compensation scheme. It has an annual ceiling of £100 million which has never been exceeded. It was set as a generous ceiling in the hope that

it would never be exceeded. His hypothetical point is not relevant to providing compensation to investors who have lost out in past events.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) stated that compliance was the main point. I agree that compliance work is the most important of all. Much of the rule and law making has been achieved. It is important that those who undertake misdeeds and malpractice are pursued. As I have tried to demonstrate in the short time this evening, that is exactly what is happening on a scale unlike anything that went before. There has been a big escalation in the number of cases being brought and in vigilance. I do not believe that wickedness has increased greatly since the 1960s and 1970s, so it shows that regulators are taking a much firmer line and finding out more of the misdeeds.

I must conclude now because of time. I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) for their kind remarks about some features of the Financial Services Act system. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester that directors must live up to their responsibilities. Those responsibilities are clear in company law, but I shall do everything in my power to ensure that directors live up to them and I shall pursue directors if they do not.

6.58 pm

Mr. Warren: Many hon. Members have asked me not to withdraw my motion and to debate it again after 11.30 pm. However, I now feel obliged to withdraw it. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

The Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

Fisheries

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I must tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment standing in the name of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and her hon. Friends.

6.59 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 11th December 1990 relating to Total Allowable Catches and Quotas for 1991 and its Supplementary explanatory memorandum of 12th December 1990, the proposals described in its un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 11th December 1990, relating to the reciprocal fisheries Agreement between the Community and Norway for 1991, European Community Document No. 9898/90 on guide prices for fishery products for 1991, and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1991 consistent with the requirement for conservation of fishing stocks.

We shall spend much of this debate discussing the fishing industry and its opportunities next year. Inevitably, our discussion will be based on scientific facts and legal and administrative arrangements. However, I should like us to start by remembering those who died yesterday in the terrible accident on the Premier off the Shetlands.

It behoves us to remember how difficult and dangerous the job of the fisherman is. Sometimes, people who live in comfortable homes and do comfortable jobs forget how difficult it is for those who work in the wind and weather—not only fishermen, but farmers. We are all aware of the farmer who went out to look after his sheep at the weekend and was left for many hours in the snow. People often forget how much fishermen and farmers give to their jobs.

The loss of the Premier serves to remind us not only of fishermen, but of the effect of their loss on the small, close-knit communities in which they live. Often the crews of such vessels are related to almost everyone living in a number of houses in small communities. I am sure that those who have been affected on this occasion have the sympathy of not only those who live some distance away, but of the other fishing communities of the United Kingdom. Even though there are occasional disagreements between such communities, they come together in understanding the great dangers in which they operate.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. No doubt he will be aware that today the people of Carradale buried their dead and that that community, together with those of Burghead, Lossiemouth and Hopeman, are united in their concern, as are all our maritime communities.

Has there been any communication between the Ministry and the Department of Transport about the possibility of raising the Premier from the waters in which it now lies—I understand that they are 400 ft deep? It is possible that some, if not all, of the bodies of my constituents are still on that vessel. Obviously, it is a matter of great concern to my constituents and to the families of the dead that the bodies should be returned, if possible.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also join me in asking representatives of the press and media to allow the families

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

in my constituency to come to grips with their grief in privacy? All of us share the deep sense of grief and loss felt by the affected communities.

Mr. Gummer: I do not always agree with the hon. Lady, but her latter request is of particular value. It is of great sadness to many of us that grief is commercialised in such circumstances. I hope that the press will treat the bereaved and the affected communities with the respect that they deserve in such sad circumstances. I hope that they will be left to grieve as they would wish rather than in full view of the rest of the country.

It is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who will reply to this debate, to decide whether the Premier can be raised. I want it to be known, however, that the entire United Kingdom is extremely concerned when one of its ships is lost in such a way.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman take note of the fact that the House has not had a sustained debate on the safety of fishing vessels since Sir Albert McQuarrie put through his private Member's Bill on safety at sea?

Will the right hon. Gentleman convey to the Secretary of State for Transport the belief shared by many hon. Members that we should have an early, critical scrutiny of safety matters as they affect our fishermen in their hazardous work?

Mr. Gummer: I should be happy to consider that matter with my right hon. and learned Friend. His previous responsibilities will enable him to look at the matter from both sides. I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees that there has rarely been division in the House about the safety of such vessels. I remember the all-party support that was commanded by Sir Albert McQuarrie's Bill. That Bill was worth while and has done a great deal of good, if only by highlighting the serious dangers that are present in the fishing industry.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way so often at this early stage in our proceedings.

I reinforce the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). Today, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and I received a reply to a written answer in which we asked that the new communication system to be adopted in the Clyde, which is a great step forward, be extended to other parts of the United Kingdom so that there is some liaison between submarine commanders and fishing boats. We were told that we must wait to see how the system works before it is extended. We should like to debate that issue further.

I also received a reply about transponders being fitted to fishing nets to enable submarines to detect them more easily—an idea that we have advanced for some time. The Ministry of Defence, however, said that no decision has been made about who will pay for them.

Following the sinking of the Antares, the issues raised in those questions are extremely urgent and a specific debate would give us the opportunity to discuss them further. I realise that the Department of Transport and the Ministry of Defence have prime responsibility for such matters, but the Minister has a general concern about the fishing industry and its safety. [HON. MEMBERS: "Briefly"] I hope that he will take up this matter on our behalf.

Mr. Gummer: I am glad, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you enabled the hon. Gentleman to continue his question. He is perfectly right that, although such matters are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the territorial Departments also believe that they have a particular responsibility and concern. Although we do not have control of the legislation, it is the fishermen for whom we are responsible who are most affected by it.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his complimentary support of the changes introduced by the Ministry of Defence, but I do not believe there is anything wrong in assessing how that system works before it is extended. I accept, however, that the hon. Gentleman might like to discuss it at greater length and I shall certainly raise the matter with my right hon. Friends.

The Government are sponsoring the research on transponders and I am pleased about that. The work is encouraging and we must consider how to implement the research if it proves to continue to be so encouraging. If a suitable occasion arose, my right hon. Friends and I would be happy to debate this matter. There is no bar on such a discussion and it is a matter for the Leader of the House and others.

I do not want to understate the importance of what I have already said as it provides the background against which we can discuss other matters. Tonight, however, we are specifically discussing the fishing opportunities for next year. I apologise to the House that no proposals were possible before mid-November when the latest scientific advice became available following the essential autumn surveys. We also had to conclude the third-country talks to arrive at proposals on key stocks in the North sea.

I know that the House would prefer to have such information early enough to digest it more effectively. As the Minister mainly concerned, I, too, would like to have the information earlier to prepare for the long debates that take place in the European Community. But that is not possible and I comment on my own frustration about it.

The consultations with Norway have gone through three rounds. They were completed late on 7 December, after the Commission's main total allowable catch and quota proposals were released that afternoon. Hon. Members will see the tight timetable, and I thank the Leader of the House for arranging the time for this debate, so soon after the point at which we were able to tell him that the information would be available.

We did our best to give firm figures and estimates, where necessary, in the main explanatory memorandum of 11 December. We supplied the supplementary document 24 hours later, and that completed the proposals. The House now has before it the full proposals coming before the Fisheries Council. I am grateful to the authorities of the House—the Select Committee on European Legislation and the spokesmen for the other parties—for their understanding and rapid consideration of the proposals. It is important that we have the views of the House before the Council of Fisheries Ministers meets on 19 December.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The fishermen in my constituency tell me that the failure of the Government to introduce a proper decommissioning scheme has led to the reductions. Is that true?

Mr. Gummer: I do not know whether they say that to the hon. Gentleman. If they do, even those who want a decommissioning scheme would not support that argument. It cannot be true; there is no way in which the two things could hang together in that way. There is an argument for a decommissioning scheme, although I do not accept it. But it is not based on those premises.

We shall reach a point at which we can talk about decommissioning schemes—I shall not avoid that—and I hope the hon. Gentleman will accept that we conduct our debates in the House against a background in which the real decisions are bound to be made in the European Community, because fishing is done by the whole Community and the shares of the fishing quotas are worked out among us. In those circumstances, particular TACs and quotas—fishing opportunities—are based on an assessment of the scientific advice. The question of decommissioning or non-decommissioning is totally different. When we discuss it the hon. Member for Workington may wish to intervene again, and I shall be happy to give way to him.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman will agree that this is a debate of great concern to many people. We should take matters in order and, when I come to the point about which he wishes to intervene, I shall give way to him.

I wish, first, to deal with catches and catch returns. There was considerable gloom at the start of the year. The severe cuts in North sea cod and haddock quotas, which are of the greatest economic importance to our industry, were a severe blow. We also had to introduce measures to reduce effort on haddock. It is interesting to note that the majority of vessels took up not the option to use more selective gear but the option of being restricted to 92 fishing days. That is an important point in terms of trying to decide how best to deal with conservation measures.

It is worth remembering that, of the quotas of most interest to our industry, while 17 decreased in 1990, 13 were increased and 18 remained the same.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. Gentleman said that many had taken up the option of 92 fishing days. Does he agree that that was a scheme for chosen days, not for consecutive days of the sort that is now under discussion? The idea of expecting people to fish for 10 fixed consecutive days represents a danger, with fishermen having to make up the number in the days following. That could lead to fishermen feeling obliged to go out to sea on the nominated days, even though the weather may be bad and the conditions dangerous.

Mr. Gummer: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but that is a different scheme. I hope that he will agree that one problem with the choice of days is the question of effective policing. He will agree that in his part of the world there is considerable feeling among fishermen that other fishermen have perhaps not kept to the rules with quite the assiduity that he would expect.

During this year, our distant water fleet has taken the reduced quotas north of Norway, but poor catch rates in Greenland, unlike the good catches of last year, are making it impossible to take up those quotas fully—reminding us again that the artificiality of quotas is often clearly shown up by the nature of the flow of the water and the presence of the fish.

Nearer home, there has been a heavier take-up of quotas, requiring considerable management to spread the quota through the year. There have also been considerable management difficulties arising from unusual catching patterns declared by fishermen, particularly of cod and haddock.

Dr. Godman: The right hon. Gentleman referred to fishing in northern, particularly Greenland, waters. One reason for the poor take-up has been the exceptionally severe weather with the presence of ice. The two together have made matters extremely difficult for our fishermen. I appeal to the Minister—I have made this appeal before—to accept that fishermen should be in Greenland waters only if they have experience of fishing in the area. In other words, the right hon. Gentleman should try to persuade others without the necessary experience not to go into those waters.

Mr. Gummer: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. People must have track records to fish in those areas. It is difficult to be too prescriptive about such matters, but when it comes to fishing in difficult areas—I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing a difficult area, in which the reasons for not catching have included severe weather and ice—some experience of those areas is important. But how one gets experience if one is closed from an area until one has such experience is a difficulty that all must face.

We must accept that, even in unhappy situations where patterns do not appear to fit what the expectations were in the returns, fish is in considerable demand and prices have risen greatly. Up to the end of September, the value of all landings increased by 10 per cent., despite a 4 per cent. drop in volume. That is a remarkable fact. Within that total, I highlight white fish, such as cod, haddock and sole, for which there has been an increase in total value of 13 per cent., despite a fall in landings of 13 per cent. That has meant that fishermen have had a significant increase in return, over the increase in inflation. Of course, the customer has had to pay more because there has been less to buy.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Minister makes a point that we have heard often from the Government—that the revenue in terms of landings has been above that of last year. Does he accept that the costs of the industry have increased dramatically, particularly the costs of interest and boats, because of the high base rate in the last year, and, in recent months, the dramatic doubling in fuel costs because of the increase in the price of oil? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be more sensible to have income figures for the industry, as opposed to just the revenue figures which the Minister is quoting?

Mr. Gummer: The industry has had consistently, in 10 of the past 11 years, an increase in its returns over and above the rate of inflation. The hon. Gentleman cannot count the rate of inflation twice. The rate of inflation is created by a number of elements and there are many

[Mr. Gummer]

industries in which the contribution, for example, of fuel costs as a proportion of its total costs is considerably greater than that of the fishing industry.

Mr. Salmond: Really!

Mr. Gummer: A simple example is the cement industry, where fuel represents 50 per cent. of its costs. It is significantly less in the fishing industry. It does not help the hon. Gentleman's case to suggest other than that. Although the fishing industry has suffered from the reduction in the amount that it can take, it has had the advantage of an increase in the price of what it has sold. Many other industries, not least farming, would envy that. We should always start with facts rather than with embroidering them.

I am surprised by the amendment tabled by the Scottish National party, because it does not seem to square with the arguments advanced by that party in the previous debate on a similar subject in this House. In that debate, the official Opposition were careful to agree that if we took the necessary tough measures for conservation they would have to have a real impact on fishermen. But the hon. Member for Moray and her hon. Friends suggested that conservation measures could be taken without their causing difficulties for the people on whom they were imposed.

The same is happening today. There is always the idea that there is a soft option, and it is always the Scottish National party which produces it. The House is tired of the attempt to buy votes today from the livelihoods of fishermen tomorrow—yet that is what the amendment suggests. It suggests conservation measures that do not restrict efforts to catch fish today while hiding from people the fact that their sons and daughters will not have fish tomorrow and that their communities will be destroyed. Both sides of the House should oppose this easy option advanced by the Scottish Nationalists. The rest of us, who are responsible for these matters, have to tell the fishing industry that, to protect jobs in the future, it will have to take some fairly tough measures now.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Does my right hon. Friend take the view that I do, that sea fishery committees paid for by local community charge payers, such as the Devon and Cornwall sea fishery committee, are of great assistance to him, bearing in mind that it is difficult to have committees of fishermen, who are at sea so much of the time, communicating to my right hon. Friend's Department local realities and problems? Will he also say a word about the cost of enforcement? In many people's view, the action of enforcement should be by the nation state, but the cost of it should fall on the Community budget.

Mr. Gummer: I agree that the sea fishery committees are of great importance. We are discussing whether we could extend their remit so that they can carry out an even more useful job in the future. The Scots do not have the same system north of the border. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland would like to look at what we do south of the border. Both parts of the United Kingdom can learn from the other. I am sure that we could learn some things from Scotland, but our system works very well.

The United Kingdom has been responsible for setting up a European Community police force for fishing and for extending it. The balance is probably about right, but I am happy to re-examine it. Some countries that used to be less than careful about obeying the law are beginning to be much more careful because of the international force for which the United Kingdom is responsible.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Far be it from me to defend the SNP, with whose members I have little in common, but the Minister makes a great mistake if he seeks to turn this serious debate into a party political broadcast—or if he tries to divide us on grounds of party.

Tough measures to reduce the fishing effort must be taken, as we all agree. But if the Minister reads the amendment he will see that it suggests that it is time we stopped the idea—the hallmark of this Government—that the only way to make progress or bring about change is to inflict pain on people. It appears that one can effect change only by suffering pain—a sort of masochism.

Mr. Foulkes: It is sadism.

Mr. Hughes: Be that as it may, the fact remains that there is unanimity among Opposition parties—many Conservative Members agree—about the necessity for a proper decommissioning scheme, and that is how I read the amendment. If that is indeed what it says, I shall support it in the Lobby.

Mr. Gummer: Nowhere does the amendment mention decommissioning——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: What about structural support?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady can talk in vague terms of structural support, but I am talking about the amendment, in which there are seven lines—all of them meant to divide —before we reach the words "structural support".

I am making the same point as did the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). There is no need for the House to be divided on the main issues that we have to fight in the European Community.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Square mesh panels?

Mr. Gummer: I will come to them in a moment.

Once again the Scottish National party is trying to give fishermen the impression that it has a policy different from those of the Opposition or of the Government, obtainable in Europe and therefore viable in circumstances that might attract a vote or two for the SNP. That is what I object to. The House should try to produce a policy which we can fight in the Community and which will benefit all fishermen in the United Kingdom. To do that we must ensure that we table words of agreement.

Let us examine the amendment in that light. It

"demands that the Government . . . pursue a more vigorous policy in the fisheries negotiations".

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and I could hardly be more vigorous than we are. Anyone in the Community would confirm that for five years the United Kingdom has exhibited more vigour than any other country, which explains why we have had a better deal than any other country.

The amendment continues

"by insisting on implementation of the technical conservation measures on square mesh panels agreed by fishermen".

We cannot insist on those things. We have to negotiate them and get them agreed by our neighbours in the Community, which is precisely what we are doing. We are fighting for them in Europe. It is about time that the party that claims to be the European party in Scotland learnt that we do not insist——

Mr. Robert Hughes: SNP Members have changed their minds about that—the Minister is out of date.

Mr. Gummer: I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman back on my side. I am an enthusiast for the European Community, but I do not go round insisting on things. We must negotiate.

The amendment continues,

"rejecting the discriminatory and unworkable proposals on limitation of effort proposed by the EC Commission".

We have already done that, so I do not see the need for the amendment. The case for doing that has been forcefully presented by the United Kingdom Government, with the support of one or two other countries, and we are likely to enjoy some success on the issue.

It would be easier if the European Community found that both sides of this House were united, as are the other countries with which we are negotiating——

Mr. Wallace: I refer to the point about technical limitations. Is the Minister saying that the United Kingdom Government will resist the Commission's proposal for a ban on fishing on 10 consecutive days in a month?

Mr. Gummer: That is not a technical, conservation measure—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is not: it is a quota management device. I see that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, a former Opposition fisheries spokesman, agrees with me. If Members of Opposition parties cannot even get the technicalities right in a debate of this sort, it suggests that the Scottish Nationalists are much more interested in politics than they are in fishermen——

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: I have made a serious claim and I shall continue to make it once I have given way to the hon. Gentleman, the successor to Sir Albert McQuarrie.

Mr. Salmond: I thank the Minister for finally giving way. He is digging rather a deep hole for himself. Thus far he has managed to unite the Opposition against him. He says that the amendment will not force conservation measures, but it supports technical conservation measures, a clampdown on industrial fishing and participation in the Community's structure policy. Every hon. Member except the Minister seems to know that that policy means decommissioning and lay-up schemes. How can the Minister defend his position in the face of the words in the amendment? In view of what the amendment says, why does not the Minister accept it?

Mr. Gummer: No doubt the amendment suggests that we are not supporting such things. The hon. Gentleman says in his document that we should move to the elimination of industrial fishing. That is the policy of the Government and has already been put forward. If the amendment contained only that one suggestion I would be happy to say that it was in line with our policy. I have always been opposed to industrial fishing and I have constantly battled against it. The only change in the situation is that many of the species that used to be fished industrially, such as horse mackerel, are now fished for human consumption. There has been a significant change in that respect. It is plain that the Opposition do not understand that. It is a technical matter for the fishing industry. It does not help our battle in the European Community when amendments seek to divide us rather than to support a United Kingdom policy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I have given way enough. If I give way any more there will be complaints that I have taken up too much time.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, because I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

Quota levels, however, are not the only preoccupation. Much of this year has been devoted by the Government and the industry to pressing for improved technical conservation measures. I very much regret that a difference of opinion between most member states and the Commission about the degree of change needed prevented the November Fisheries Council from agreeing on new measures designed particularly to help cod and haddock.

I am a great believer in conservation, but conservation does not mean producing a net that is incapable of catching fish—a proposition put forward by the Commission. We put a net behind a boat and pulled it and caught, I think, eight fish. We cannot agree to conservation measures that are not based upon conserving the jobs of fishermen as well as stocks of fish. There must be a balance and some of the Commission's propositions appear to be devised by people who do not know one end of a net or one kind of fish from another. It will be most important in the near future to secure improved selectivity of nets so that the wasteful catch of juvenile fish can be reduced to a minimum. If we are to do that, we cannot merely accept the proposals put forward by some fishermen because they will not secure that objective. We must consider square mesh nets with meshes that are larger than 80 mm so that the correct balance can be achieved. We are asking for change but it must be realistic. We must strike a balance between conservation of stocks and conservation of the industry. If stocks are improperly looked after, some species will be preyed upon by others.

Mr. Foulkes: I do not propose to raise the temperature now that it has, thankfully, been lowered. The Minister talks about conservation measures. He knows that precautionary total allowable catches apply to plaice, monkfish and megrim. There is no scientific evidence for those restrictions and no conservation is involved. The Minister gave a clear pledge that the Government would fight hard to increase the allowable catches of new species of fish being brought to the Market. Will he assure us that he will press for substantial increases in the catch of those three species?

Mr. Gummer: I give the hon. Gentleman the absolute assurance that where there is no scientific reason or no real concern we will press for the largest possible allowable catch. The issues must be discussed one by one. He will agree that sometimes a precautionary TAC is sensible when, in view of the evidence, that seems the best thing to do and it appears that it would be dangerous to move too

[Mr. Gummer]

far. Perhaps he also agrees that in the absence of full scientific advice it is better to take precautions than to run the risk of exhausting future stocks. As I said, the balance is important and where it is safe to do so we shall fight hard to increase catches.

Dr. Godman: The Minister said that he saw me nodding in agreement when he spoke about some fishermen not fishing for 10 consecutive days. He spoke about a system of quota management. We are all concerned about safety and this is a serious matter. Presumably fishermen would not fish for six days because the 10-day period would contain two weekends. Some fishermen may stay out in bad weather and because of the difficulties that they face they may be prepared to shoot their gear in unfavourable conditions. That is why I disagree emphatically and entirely with that 10-day proposal.

Mr. Gummer: I thought that I had made myself clear, but if I did not I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. He nodded in agreement that this was a matter of quota management rather than technical conservation. That is important because those are the terms under which we negotiate and seek to get an answer. I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's fears. We are looking for the maximum flexibility consistent with proper management and we shall take into account the hon. Gentleman's points.

In the case of the three species mentioned by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), we think that the precautionary total allowable catches are too low and we shall fight for a considerable increase.

The document refers to structural support and that euphemism, chosen by the hon. Member for Moray and her hon. Friends, means decommissioning. I shall now turn to fleet rationalisation. Since 1988 we have not permitted licence transfers which would increase the tonnage or horse power of our fleet. Earlier this year we extended licensing to virtually all stocks and introduced capacity aggregation. Capacity aggregation brought a little more flexibility into our licence transfer rules, but on condition that any amalgamation of licences was accompanied by a 10 per cent. reduction in fishing capacity.

Capacity aggregation also gives members of producer organisations new opportunities to rationalise the exploitation of their producer organisations' sectoral allocations. We also circulated to the industry proposals for entitlement aggregation to provide added opportunities for fleet rationalisation. We are reviewing the situation in the light of the industry's comments.

However, I emphasise that decomissioning is not the way to reduce the pressure on fish stocks and I shall try to explain why I think that that is not the case.

A case can be advanced to show that it would be nice for a considerable amount of extra money to go to the fishing industry in this way. It is perfectly reasonable to argue that case, but it is not reasonable to say that it is a sensible way to reduce pressure on stocks. It will put more money into the industry, but it will not do the job.

Even a limited decommissioning scheme would cost many millions of pounds. We could spend a great deal of money reducing the size of the fleet and make very little difference to the pressure on the stocks. If we remove tonnage from the fishing fleet, the remaining tonnage can simply fish harder so that the total effort against the stocks is not reduced. No doubt one could try to reduce that risk by targeting a decommissioning scheme at the most effective vessels, but there would still be the likelihood of decommissioning funds being recycled so that the fishing effort did not really decrease. It would be strange to use taxpayers' money in an effort to remove from our fleet the most effective vessels.

I cannot help but feel that those who continue to argue for a decommissioning scheme simply want taxpayers' money for the industry regardless of whether that expenditure will achieve worthwhile objectives. I hope that the industry will accept that a decommissioning scheme simply will not provide value for money. It must start thinking constructively about the sort of ideas that we have put before it, and I hope that at least some producer organisations will encourage their members to take advantage of the opportunities already provided by capacity aggregation.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does not the Minister understand that capacity aggregation would open up the market for predators who would take over the small family businesses which are so important to many of our communities? Secondly, why is it that, apart from Ireland, the United Kingdom is the only country in the EC that has not introduced a decommissioning scheme? Everybody else is further down that route because they recognise that it is an important part of fisheries policy.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady cannot argue that aggregation would somehow have that effect, but decommissioning would not. Does she not think that small businesses would go in for the decommissioning scheme, and that it would not have the same effect? The hon. Lady cannot invent a system which does not mean that those who want to leave will take the money and cease to use their boats. If the hon. Lady really meant that, she would be against not only aggregation but decommissioning. As for her interesting comment that, because the rest of the Community chooses to do this, they must be right and we must be wrong, that avoids the argument. Only three countries are hitting their multi-annual guidance programme targets. The hon. Lady cannot deny that, if there were a decommissioning scheme, people would put their least effective boats in to get the money and keep their most effective boats for fishing. That will happen and, as sure as eggs is eggs, immediately afterwards the House of Commons would say that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had once again wasted taxpayers' money by buying out boats that were not fishing and leaving the other boats to do the fishing.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Does not my right hon. Friend understand that the British taxpayer is contributing to the other schemes through our contributions to the EC, and that the British taxpayer would like some of that money back here?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend must recognise that the Fontainebleau agreement means that if we extended the scheme to the United Kingdom, 70 per cent. would be paid by the EC, but we would then pay 70 per cent. of that 70 per cent. He is saying that to obtain a tiny amount of money we should do something which is wasteful and I am not prepared to do that. I am not prepared to pay 30 per

cent. of taxpayers' money to start with, and 70 per cent. of that which remains, to pretend that we are doing something useful. I am prepared to stand up and say clearly that I want to spend taxpayers' money usefully, in a way which will stand up under any investigation, and I do not believe that this will.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I must get on. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members cannot say that I have not given way again and again.

In examining the scientific advice on catchable quantities for next year, we must remember that we are dealing with a naturally renewable resource. It is important to remember that fishing is a hunting industry. To ensure that stocks are renewable, catches need to be managed. Managers cannot do anything about runs of poor year classes, such as we have seen for cod and haddock in the North sea, but we must try to control catches in relation to stocks.

The Government have a clear record on conservation. Fishing is no different from any other of man's industries using natural resources. We must pay attention to conservation. The Commission has taken a strict view of the scientific advice and is looking for considerable changes this year to shorten the time in which the stocks recover to better levels. We must face the fact that most stocks in Community waters have been heavily fished. This is reflected in the proposal. Among those of interest to the United Kingdom this year, we have proposals suggesting reductions in 23 quotas, proposed increases for nine and no change for 16. We must stay in line with scientific advice, but where it is possible we must temper conservation of the fish with conservation of the fishermen. That is why I answered the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley as I did.

Many of the present low catches are blamed on the TAC system itself. It is said to have failed. That is not right. A constant theme in the scientific advice is that levels of fishing have been higher than recommended TACs, whether illegal and undeclared, or higher discards than estimated. It is a fact that Ministers have been setting TACs within the levels that scientists have advised are biologically sound, but some fishermen conspire to undermine the system by misreporting, excessive discarding, or perhaps not fully declaring their catches.

Therefore, we need compliance with fishing recommendations and good catch data. We must remember that TACs provide a framework within which to manage fisheries, both in overall terms and between fishing fleets. Technical conservation measures are important to control the quality and type of fish caught, but they alone cannot achieve successful management of the stock.

That is an issue which divides hon. Members in some parts of the House from others, but it is important because of the problems that have occurred, particularly in Scotland this year, with the way in which various catches have been reported. It is no good pretending that a system is acceptable to fishermen if some parts of the country believe that other parts have said that they caught fish where they did not. We cannot hide from that. Nor will it be possible to explain to fishermen that we should take unusual reporting years into account when it comes to making arrangements elsewhere. It cannot be done because that position cannot be defended elsewhere.

I recognise that the outlook for 1991 is difficult, but it will be more difficult if we cannot get on top of such activity. Our key objective must be to obtain the highest level of quotas compatible with scientific advice and to maximise opportunities for United Kingdom fishermen. We must also aim to ensure parity of treatment throughout the Community where measures are taken to deal with particular stocks.

Secondly, we will of course invoke the Hague preference where necessary. That is likely to be necessary in the North sea for haddock and cod, and on the west coast for whiting and saithe. In the Irish sea, the Hague preference works in favour of the Irish Republic for cod, plaice and whiting.

Obviously, a balance must be struck, but we must defend our communities that depend heavily on fishing. I regret that the Commission's proposals this year contain no adjustment for the preference. I must warn the House that some member states disagree with the interpretation that the Hague preference applies. They consider that it has already been taken into account in the national allocations. We shall have to fight that extremely hard.

Thirdly, we need to secure again the flexibility to take western mackerel stock east of 4 deg. west. The substantially changed migration pattern of that stock, which now spends longer in the Norwegian exclusive zone, caused considerable difficulties between the EC and Norway in establishing a mutually acceptable arrangement for the proportion of that stock which might be taken. We are pleased that the EC-Norway agreement, as initiallised, provides for the Community to implement the flexibility if it chooses to do so. I intend to press that it does so choose.

Fourthly, we shall seek a sensible allocation of the horse mackerel TACs, particularly in the western zone, to reflect the increasing fishery for human consumption purposes to which I referred earlier. In our view, that should be given priority over the former industrial fishery. I repeat what I have always said in the House, that I do not believe in industrial fishery ever taking priority or being acceptable where there is any danger to the stock.

Fifthly, on the measures to control effort on cod and haddock in the North sea and the west of Scotland, we must accept that something needs to be done. This year's proposal is positive in that it applies to all member states concerned. We recognise that the measures as proposed by the Commission would be painful for some vessels, but at the same time recovery will not be possible without serious action. TACs are essential as a ceiling, but to keep within that ceiling we need to reduce discards to prevent misreporting and so keep catches to TAC levels. The Council will also be considering again proposals to improve technical conservation.

Once again, we shall have a tough time to protect the interests of the industry in our discussions. Those interests are not just about fishing this year, but about ensuring that we can fish next year and the years to come. They are not just about providing opportunities in fishing for some parts of the United Kingdom; they are also about providing opportunities for all parts of the United Kingdom. They are about trying to ensure not just that the British fishing industry has reasonable access to fishing grounds, but that we have fair access to fishing grounds.

[Mr. Gummer]

Above all, they are about ensuring that the rules by which we have to live and upon which our future depends are equally applied, not only between the countries of the EC but between different parts of the United Kingdom.

7.49 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I congratulate the Minister on giving the House an opportunity to debate before he goes into conference next week these important proposals and their likely effect on the United Kingdom fishing industry.

I offer my sincere condolences, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), whose constituency suffered the tragic loss of the fishing vessel Premier. As she will know, a number of hon. Members represent Humberside constituencies, and I myself have lived in Humberside my whole adult life and appreciate full well the impact that the loss of a fishing boat has on a close-knit community and how it affects the many people who knew those who served on it and their families.

My party accepts that we must develop our fisheries as a sustainable resource, and in doing so we must be guided by the best scientific evidence available. However, I am concerned that some of the scientific advice behind the proposals is imprecise. Certain quotas appear to be based on assumptions, and I understand that the scientists themselves have experienced difficulty in backing up their figures with hard evidence—as one might expect in certain instances.

I am concerned also that the recommendation concerning Irish sea cod, for which a massive cut of 61 per cent. in the total allowable catch is suggested, seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the current situation in Irish sea fisheries. I hope that the Minister will make it clear to the Commission that there has been a switch of effort there to hake, particularly in the spring fishery—which is the peak time for cod. It may be that that has not been taken into account in the scientists' figures.

We all know what happened in area VII this year in terms of deliberate misreporting, and I am worried in case those inaccurate figures have been used in the calculations. I am concerned too about the further North sea cuts that are proposed. I acknowledge that some TACs will remain the same, and that there have been some small increases —particularly in respect of whiting. Nevertheless, given this year's drastic cuts in the existing quotas, does not the Minister acknowledge the importance of at least trying both to maintain the status quo and, where scientific evidence permits, to secure the best possible deal for raised quotas where fishery can be sustained?

Right hon. and hon. Members may recall that in our previous fishery debate we discussed the fact that whiting was to be allowed to be taken in greater numbers because it is a target species for industrial fisheries. I find it curious that, while such an increase is to be permitted in the North sea, there is to be a decrease in the Irish sea. If whiting is considered to be such a ferocious predator of other fish stocks, I cannot understand the logic of increasing the catch in the North sea but decreasing it in the Irish sea. I presume that the whiting in both seas share the same prey and do not have different diets simply because they are of a different size in different seas, and that whiting in the North sea are not somehow more dangerous than those elsewhere. That is the differentiation that makes people suspicious about the calculations.

Does the Minister agree that the Hague preference is a blunt instrument? I noted and appreciate his comments, but we should all prefer reasonable quotas and TACs, rather than see quotas cut back to a level at which the Hague preference must be implemented. I acknowledge also the Minister's comment that in certain cases that provision would benefit the Irish Republic at the expense of United Kingdom fishing fleets.

The proposed cuts in channel flat fish and cod TACs are also worrying. I recently spoke to fishermen in Hastings and Rye about the problems that they have, which very much mirror those of fishermen around the coast—whether north, south, east or west. I note that there could be quota swaps with the Netherlands in respect of North sea plaice to boost the number of fish available, but can the Minister give an assurance that, if swaps with other countries are arranged, they will be based on a direct cod equivalent—if that species is the subject of a swap—and not on one that will benefit other countries? That has happened in the past, particularly with the Dutch.

Will the Minister try to avoid in this year's negotiations the kind of trade-off given last year, when the Danes received 500 tonnes of cod from our allocation as part of the political wheeling and dealing? I do not underestimate the pressure on the right hon. Gentleman, but given that our own fishing fleet is so strapped for quota, it is hard to see any justification for giving away such large amounts of high-quality fish.

I am convinced from my discussions with fishermen that, in an ideal world, they would much prefer to control the conservation of fish stocks by the use of appropriate, selective gear rather than by imposed quotas. Given the research and development that is under way, it may be that in time we shall be able to move towards conservation by means of selective gear, but I share the Minister's concern that the 120 mm mesh size proposed by the Commission is far too fine, particularly for mixed fisheries, and would certainly not be sustainable for our northern fleet.

I know that some British fleets successfully use a 120 mm mesh, particularly in cod fisheries in Grimsby, as has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). We pay tribute to those who are going for larger, premium fish, and who fish in a way that is both sustainable and conservation friendly.

I read the reports of the trials using 120 mm and 90 mm nets, and confirm the Minister's claim that during a two-week fishing trip, only eight marketable haddock were caught using the larger net, and no whiting whatever. However, it must be said that the boat used in that trial, Heather Spring—financed by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, the Sea Fish Industry Authority, Grampian regional council, and the Scottish White Fish Producers Associaton—was a twin-rig trawl. While it is true that the 120 mm mesh net was unrealistic in terms of sustaining any sort of commercial fishery, the enormous discard rate of the 90 mm net should be noted.

In that experiment, the 90 mm net caught 693 haddock of legal size and 846 haddock that legally would have to be discarded—far more than the total legal catch. The 90 mm net caught 378 whiting of legal size, and 525 undersized whiting that would have had to be discarded. On that basis, for every 100 tonnes of fish of legal size caught,

another 127 tonnes of undersized catch would have to be dumped over the side. That proportion of discards shows the real need to move towards conservation gear.

I was pleased to hear what the Minister said about industrial fishing. I do not recall hearing him make such a strong statement before. On behalf of the Opposition, I have consistently argued for an end to industrial fishing because of its unacceptable ecological impact and the by-catch that it entails. The discard rate that I have described is equally unacceptable. What is needed is a switch to the square meshed panels and conservation gear that are now being used experimentally.

We should not necessarily lock ourselves into minimum and maximum mesh size requirements. Different mesh sizes may be needed at different times of the year and in different parts of the sea—for example, in nursery areas. There is a cod box off the coast of Denmark where a 120 mm net would not be inappropriate during a period in which the cod were spawning, or considered to be vulnerable. A specific mesh size or gear type may not be the only answer to all our problems; fishermen should be able to operate with more flexibility.

We know that square-mesh panels result in a significant improvement. We have discussed the research that has been done, and the way in which such panels have been pioneered in this country. It is not clear, however, that the Commission's proposal for upper panels alone is an effective option, especially for cod fishing. It is more than possible that, if square meshes are used, both top and bottom panels should come into play to allow cod to escape from the bottom of the nets. Certainly more research is needed.

I was alarmed to read that fishermen on the east coast, who have been pioneering the trials, felt that there had been unacceptable delays in the financing and setting up of the experiments. Mr. Trumility, gear development officer at the sea fish gear development centre at the Hull technical unit, told *Fishing News* that the delays were due to lack of time, resources and staff. Surely the Minister agrees that, with the industry facing a crisis and under great pressure, priority should be given to such research and development. Fishermen themselves feel that they are under a constraint: their problems are not given anything like the same priority as those of agriculture. Of course agriculture too has its problems, but I feel that it is not unreasonable for the two sectors to receive equal treatment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The problem was illustrated for me last year, when I went to see the Minister with responsibility for fishing about a constituency matter. Fishermen in my area faced bankruptcy during, and following, the inclement weather, but the Minister said that there was no money. Meanwhile, the farmers were tipping over billions. I could not work out why that was.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is always quick to speak on behalf of his local fishermen, and he has made his point very well. When farmers are being paid to set lands aside, it is surely not unreasonable to suggest that fishermen should receive similar assistance.

Mr. Foulkes: May I give my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) some advice? If he wants to know why that is, he should count the farmers and ex-farmers on the Conservative Benches and then count the fishermen and ex-fishermen. He will find that, while there is a large number of the former, in the latter case there is a big round zero.

Mr. Gummer: As one who is neither an ex-fisherman nor an ex-farmer, may I say that I am sure that the farming industry would be happy to swap much of the support that it has received for circumstances that would have allowed its receipts to increase faster than the cost of living in nine of the past 10 years? Farming incomes have dropped sharply, and both incomes and receipts have suffered a good deal. Surely it is not unreasonable for us to help.

Mr. Morley: I do not dispute the fact that farmers have their problems, but I think that the fisheries sector deserves similar treatment. While it is true that farm incomes have been cut—although there was a slight increase in the last financial year—farmers have had their good years and their boom times; incidentally, that has happened more under a Labour Government than under the present Administration.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): My hon. Friend should also remind Conservative Members that, in the allocation of resources, share fishermen—who do very badly when the vessels are not at sea, eking out a precarious living—have been doubly maltreated by the Government. Under the new social security regime, they are effectively being denied the benefits due to them: they are paying in more and receiving less while the vessels are laid up for the Christmas season.

Mr. Morley: I understand that, following a review by the Department of Social Security, it has been decided not to change the regulations applying to share fishermen, who are indeed paying a higher stamp while receiving no extra benefits when they are unable to fish—particularly when laid up in ports by bad weather. I intend to take up the matter with the DSS, and I hope that the Government will reconsider. I do not think that such unequal treatment can be justified.

I am encouraged by news that the square mesh experiments have been carried out with nephrops, although it is too early to say what benefits will result. I also note that the EC is proposing TACs in all areas; I hope that the Minister will ensure that, if they are applied, the historical track record of those involved in the fisheries is taken into account, and that further consideration is given to the restriction of twin-rig trawls. The Minister has been very good about conservation gear and its effects, but when we have raised the problem of twin-rig trawls—particularly in the nephrops areas—he has been strangely reluctant to take steps to restrict such gear, although the fishermen are very much in favour of it.

I understand that the EC is considering changes in the horse mackerel TACs. I was glad to hear the Minister say that he would bear in mind the fact that the horse mackerel fishery has been developed for human consumption, which has been a great help to our slowly reviving pelagic fleet. Given its present market, it is a very high value-added product, and it would be a great shame if the fishery were squandered on industrial fishing. I also hope that the Minister will resist any pressure for TACs to be allocated on a national basis.

The Minister will have been waiting for Opposition Members to mention decommissioning, and I do not intend to disappoint him. We have said the same thing

[Mr. Morley]

time and again. The Minister was not here when we last debated decommissioning, but at that time not a single hon. Member representing a fishing constituency supported the Government's refusal to provide a decommissioning scheme, and I suspect that the same will happen this time. We know very well that this country has made no progress in meeting capacity cuts in line with the multi-annual guidance programme. We have one of the worst records in the EC. The Minister said that only a few countries have met their target, but at least some have done so. The danger is that countries such as Denmark, which has a high classification and is on line with its target programme, will argue that they should be exempt from some of the technical measures because they have met their targets in line with the multi-annual guidance programme. The danger is that some of the EC proposals will be imposed upon us because we are making no progress in reducing capacity and effort.

The Minister talked about the last decommissioning scheme and I do not doubt that there was waste and abuse and that it did not meet the criteria. The Minister may not have been here when the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), told the House that it was not beyond the powers of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to come forward with a decommissioning scheme that would meet the criteria that we would want to see and ensure that capacity was reduced. In terms of cost, the Minister knows that the scheme is geared towards horse power and the age of fleets. If the older and less powerful boats were taken out, that would be reflected in the overall cost because the scheme is designed to reflect age, power and catching capacity. I do not see any reason why a scheme could not be put together to ensure that boats are taken out and that effort and capacity are reduced in line with the multi-annual guidance programme without it being abused or a waste of money. I cannot accept the Minister's arguments. I do not believe that the necessary expertise is not available.

Mr. Gummer: A fisherman may have two boats, one fishing for 90 days and one for 100 days. If he takes one of those boats out, is not it possible for the other boat to fish consecutively more days so that the effort is not altered at all? The only benefit that arises is that the fisherman pockets the decommissioning money. There is no way in which the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) can suggest that we can use a decommissioning system that does not end up like that. All I am saying is that that is not a sensible way to spend taxpayers' money on reducing effort, although it may be a reasonable way to put money into the fishing industry if that is one's only aim.

Mr. Morley: With respect, that assumes that if someone is fishing for less time with one boat, he is catching fewer fish. A fisherman may catch a higher percentage of fish simply because he strikes lucky or because of the gear that he is using or the way in which he is working. It is not as simple as the Minister suggests.

How will we reduce capacity? We are not getting anywhere with the Minister's proposals. The steps that he has taken, such as licence aggregation and proposed entitlement aggregation, only scratch the surface of over-capacity. I should have been more impressed if the Minister had shown the House that some progress was being made towards reaching the targets. We know that the schemes are being used successfully in other countries, which have reduced their fleets in line with the EC regulations. Because they have reduced their fleets, they qualify for modernisation grants and can restructure their fleets to make them more efficient and modern, thereby sustaining their industry at the expense of United Kingdom taxpayers who are paying into the fund but receiving nothing from it, notwithstanding the Minister's comments about the Fontainebleau agreement.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is now showing the absurdity of the scheme. He is suggesting that we should spend money taking boats from the fleet so that there would be an opportunity to take more money to modernise the boats left in the fleet so that their effort would increase. It is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman's taxpayers and the taxpayers of every constituency would be paying for that because of the Fontainebleau agreement. The hon. Gentleman is asking for taxpayers' money to reduce the fleet without reducing the effort and then to modernise the fleet in order to increase effort. It does not make sense.

Mr. Morley: I do not accept that. Fishing boats do not stay the same for ever. Already, certain parts of United Kingdom fleets, particularly in inshore areas, are having problems with aging fleets. Fishermen, because of the tight quotas, are unable to invest in replacements. There has to be a properly managed and sustainable industry that will ensure that the fishermen can find the investment that they need. Even with a reduced fleet, there will still have to be modernisation and investment. That can be done only with restructuring and we can restructure only with a decommissioning scheme.

The Minister would have greater credibility if he could demonstrate to the House that something is happening with his policies to reduce effort and capacity. Nothing is happening, so the onus is on him. If he rejects decommissioning, he must produce a workable scheme to meet the objectives, but he has failed to do so.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I put a simple question to my hon. Friend? Will he press the Minister to explain why those schemes work in Europe but not here?

Mr. Morley: It is for the Minister to answer that. Other countries have not been slow in utilising the money to their advantage.

Mr. Gummer: First, we must remember that we are in Europe and that we are talking about other parts of Europe. I do not know how we shall deal with the European Community if we continue to talk like that. Secondly, the schemes do not work there either. There is no sign that effort is being reduced in other European countries. The money is being paid out but effort is not being reduced. It is not sensible for us, when we do not receive an enormous amount from Europe because of the Fontainebleau agreement, to do something that is not helpful to us and does not deal with effort.

Mr. Morley: With respect, the Minister has not demonstrated that what he is doing is helpful. The other European countries have made it clear that they are meeting their targets and are dealing with their fisheries with decommissioning as one of the management tools at

their disposal. The Minister is saying that it will not work in this country but is offering no alternative. He does not have a good track record to convince me or other hon. Members of what he has achieved. If the Minister could give us an idea of how he intends to meet the targets under the multi-annual guidance programme, we should be more reassured. We are not meeting the targets and we are not reducing effort. Funds are available in the EC to help with restructuring and reducing effort and the Government should take advantage of them.

Recently, when addressing the Commission, which was pressing him about restructuring, the Fisheries Commissioner said:

"The Community participates in expenditure which is spent by member states. You have a right to that aid. The only problem is that as far as the British Authorities are concerned, they have not put in a request for it. I cannot pay subsidies if I am not asked to do so."

That suggests that the funds are available but the Government are not applying for them.

I should like to make some positive suggestions that the Minister may wish to take with him in his negotiations. We need an overall fishing strategy. There have been problems enforcing the fishing regulations, particularly in area VII. We are all aware of the fraud that occurred there and I note—I am ready to be corrected—that there has been no prosecution of anybody involved. Given those problems, would the Minister consider compulsory fitting of transponders on all fishing vessels? That would enable fleets to be tracked and monitored through central management. It would be a great aid to the management of our fisheries. It would show where fleets are operating and would have an added safety benefit, because should a transponder stop transmitting, the position of the vessel would immediately be recorded.

Will the Minister consider involving fishermen more in decision making on conservation? I am concerned that there seems to be little close contact between the scientists, who make recommendations, and fishermen, who well know the movements of fish, their size and their spawning areas. Many times, fishermen have said that certain parts of the fishing grounds could be closed or restricted. I am aware of the programme to close certain sensitive areas, but I do not see why fishermen could not be involved more in decision making, in recommendations and in the management of their fishing grounds.

It seems that the EC does not consult fishermen closely. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned the 10-day restriction to reduce effort. He rightly said that 10 days in every month is no use because fishermen need flexibility of approach. They rely on the weather and the tides. It would be devastating, for the purpose of neat bureaucracy, for them to have to spend 10 days in every month in port and not be allowed to fish. That is not a reasonable or sensible approach. I hope that the Minister will consider it.

We all know the desperate state that the industry faces if these measures are not amended and practical steps are not taken to assist our fishermen. It is not fair for the Minister to say that fishermen will be compensated by higher fish prices. There is a limit to what processors and consumers will pay for fish. It is true to say that fish prices have increased because of the shortage, but it is wrong to assume that the price will continue to increase pro rata. It will reach a ceiling, below which fishermen will be pushed into ruin.

There is a limit to the patience of fishermen while they wait for practical measures such as a decommissioning scheme and a strong and sensible policy to manage our fisheries. I take what the Minister said. I believe that he recognises some of the problems. We certainly have a little agreement on certain parts of his approach to the negotiations, but to deal with the problems that our fishermen face we need a much stronger technical restructuring scheme, at the centre of which should be the decommissioning scheme.

I return to the original point: so far, the Minister has been unable to offer anything in place of a decommissioning scheme or any evidence that his approach is effective, is working and is dealing with the problems that fishermen all round our coasts face every day.

8.22 pm

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I associate myself with the comments of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and of my right hon. Friend the Minister about the Premier. All hon. Members—the hon. Lady knows this from our discussions with her and exchanges in the past 24 hours—are sensitive to what has happened. Our thoughts and prayers go to the families of those who were so tragically involved.

Sadly, we in the north-east of Scotland are not strangers to tragedy, and that is true of fishing communities around the coasts of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the north-east of Scotland, we have also had the tragedies connected with the North sea oil industry. That underlines the fact that those who must battle with the elements for their livelihood do take special risks. Hon. Members are sensitive to those risks and join, regardless of party, in sympathy for those who have been involved in such accidents.

I must confess that I thought that we were having a question time at the beginning of the debate, which I am afraid will limit the opportunities of some hon. Members. I shall therefore do my best not to detain the House for long.

Although we welcome the explanations that my right hon. Friend the Minister always gives so lucidly on these occasions, none the less, we want the views of our parts of the United Kingdom taken into account at the negotiations. May I say quite unequivocally that I welcomed my right hon. Friend's robust defence of the United Kingdom's interests in the negotiations? Hon. Members will leave the debate heartened by what he said.

I pay tribute to the constructive, thoughtful and helpful speech of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). Many of the problems in fishing can be approached—I certainly welcomed this when I had responsibility for these matters—on a bipartisan basis, which, as my right hon. Friend acknowledged, strengthens the British negotiating position. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe certainly contributed to that.

I acknowledge what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about the fishing industry: the year turned out better than it appeared it would at the beginning. On straight financial receipts for the industry, it does look better, but I ask my right hon. Friend to remember that the results were patchy. Many of the high earnings were in the early part of the year, when many boats could not go to sea. The limited number of boats that were able to do so had good returns, but when one considers the fleet as a whole,

[Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith]

particularly the smaller classes of vessel, one realises that we cannot be complacent about the financial position of the industry. I therefore ask my right hon. Friend to consider not only the overall position of the industry but the different sectors within it—where, unfortunately, the story is not always the same.

As many hon. Members wish to speak, I shall deal only with a few specific points, the first of which is the diamond versus the square mesh net. I am delighted that we have a good debate going on this subject, because there is no doubt that we must avoid the indiscriminate slaughter of juvenile fish which occurs with the diamond mesh net. Hon. Members welcome any move towards adoption of a square mesh net, particularly in the cod end, and my right hon. Friend the Minister can rely on our wholehearted support.

My only anxiety—this is looking backwards rather than forwards—is how slow we have been to follow this up and to develop it. I am afraid that there appears to have been reluctance in certain research establishments and elsewhere to follow this through vigorously. I make the plea that we do not necessarily wait until all our experiments are completed. Let us look also at experimental and practical experience in countries such as Canada. In the course of the year, I supplied my noble Friend Lord Sanderson, who was responsible for fisheries at the Scottish Office, with much evidence, particularly from Canada. I am glad to see that it has been acted on, but let us ensure that it is acted on quickly.

I am not qualified to say which size of square mesh may be correct. All I can say is that I hope we reach a sensible compromise and that we avoid the indiscriminate slaughter of juvenile stocks, on which the future livelihood of our fishermen must depend.

The 10-day rule for the limitation of fishery effort is ridiculous. It is arbitrary, it does not take account of practical conditions in the industry, and because larger vessels can choose their time at sea much more easily than other vessels, it will, if adopted, discriminate against smaller vessels in the fleet, which none of us wants. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that that rule is dropped.

I turn to the negotiations with Norway about mackerel and herring. Can my right hon. Friend the Minister explain why the Commission recommended that the mackerel total allowable catch should be exceeded to accommodate Norway, but that the TACs for white fish recommended by scientists should be strictly complied with? That paradox should be explained. I cannot understand that proposal.

Norway is to get 28,000 tonnes more mackerel from the western stocks and is to increase its share by 4 per cent. The United Kingdom will get only 8,000 additional tonnes out of the increase. I do not believe that the result of the negotiations is fair. It discriminates against our fishermen and does not make sense in terms of a consistent policy on TACs. The same applies to North sea herring stock. Although the Norwegian share of the TAC goes down from 29 per cent. to 25 per cent., 12,500 tonnes are to be transferred from the Community to Norway. That does not make sense. The Commission must be much more resolute in negotiations with Norway.

I shall not go into the details of other TACs, because I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister has taken all those points on board. The Hague preference was hard won. Much effort was needed to get it, and I can assure my right hon. Friend of that from first-hand experience. I should hate it to be diminished in any way. I was delighted by my right hon. Friend's clear declaration. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will support him in defending it.

Structure is the most important issue. I know that my right hon. Friend will not like what I have to say, because he knows my views. My thoughts are perhaps closer to those of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe than to those of my right hon. Friend. We need a much more rigorous approach to the question of the size of the fleet and of the fishing effort. I for one would have adopted a much more rigorous licensing system than the one that the Government introduced. If we have a licensing system, it must be rigorous. I welcome the changes this year, because they are an improvement in the right direction, but we should have started with a much tighter system. That was always my belief, but, alas, a general election and a change of Government position meant that I could not follow it through.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has certain reservations about a decommissioning scheme, and he expressed them strongly this evening. It can be argued that either a more rigorous licensing scheme or a decommissioning scheme is highly interventionist, and I accept that. After all, as my right hon. Friend admitted, we are dealing with a hunting industry—moreover, one in which the resource being hunted is limited. As surely as night follows day, there must be regulation. We already have intervention. I cannot understand the reluctance to have the slightly greater degree of intervention that will be much more effective in bringing the technical and physical resources used to hunt fish more closely into gear with fish resources.

We must reduce the pressure on stocks. Although some of the measures that we have introduced are helpful, they will not bring that about in a major way. I cannot understand some of the arguments put by my right hon. Friend the Minister. Surely, if the capacity of the fishing fleet is reduced—either the more efficient or the less efficient part—the existing available catch is shared among fewer vessels and fewer fishermen and those remaining in the industry become much more viable. If, at the same time, we throw all our conservation measures overboard and decide to get rid of quotas, TACs and the rest, of course we will get more effort from the remaining capacity. But surely no one is talking about that. We keep our conservation measures, our mesh sizes for nets, our TACs and our quotas, but, by reducing capacity, we make sure that the income available to the industry is spread among fewer boats and fewer fishermen.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has spoken from the basis of his experience with company fishing vessels at Humberside, which I believe, in the light of the Public Accounts Committee's report, has scarred him. Of course, those who manage company fleets will get rid of their least efficient vessels and fish with the more efficient remaining vessels. I believe that the scheme was badly managed.

We can learn from the lessons of dealing with company fleets. But we are not talking so much about that now as about share fishermen. We are talking about a situation in which one family might own, at the most, two vessels.

Those fishermen do not have a choice. A decommissioning scheme among the share section of the fleet would take away the vessel and the ownership, and that is that—those people cannot change from one vessel to another.

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee which examined this matter. As I said in the previous fisheries debate, the report stated:

"We note that member states were given options as to how the EC scheme for decommissioning grants should be applied but MAFF chose to introduce a regulatory approach with provision for the automatic payment of flat rate grants."

Surely we should be thinking about more flexible systems, pinpointing grant where it is needed.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening, because he makes his point having examined this matter. The schemes could be refined to reduce the capacity of our fishing fleet, which would be a proper and sensible way to proceed.

I hope that I have shown that some of the assumptions made by my right hon. Friend the Minister are wrong. They should be challenged, and I certainly challenge them. I beg my right hon. Friend to consider this matter again and not to be prejudiced because of experience of a previous scheme—that can be changed. I ask him to consider the issue in the context of the inshore fleet and of the share fishermen, because they are different.

Last but not least, I believe that the industry is prepared to discuss how to co-operate in devising and operating such a scheme. The industry has offered to do that. It would be wrong if the Minister did not take up those offers and did not move forward on the issue of decommissioning in co-operation with the industry. That is vital. That matter must be dealt with as part of our fisheries policy.

8.38 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) because I agree with nearly everything that he said. I demur on his point about the Hague preference which, as far as Grimsby is concerned, is the Hague handicap because we do not get it. The right hon. Gentleman's speech was a passionate and strong invocation of a need which has been put to Ministers by hon. Members on both sides of the House—to get something done about a decommissioning scheme. The debates fall into a comon pattern, and that demand comes across strongly. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Gentleman's strong statement.

The prospects foretold by the documents are gloomy. We are in a conservation crisis. If the cuts in TACs are implemented in full—for instance, 15 per cent. for North sea cod—it will be disastrous for the industry and for Grimsby. We are a cod port. We are also a fishing centre, a market centre and a processing centre. There are nine jobs on land for every one job at sea and those jobs depend on the catches made at sea. If there is a cut in the catch, it has a knock-on effect on the whole industry—on the processing side and on the market through which a high proportion of the fish comes. It is the best market in the country and there is a distribution system which, in turn, supports the market. Those elements of the industry are now nearing the limit of viability. Any cut in catches, in throughput in the market and in what goes into the distribution system would have a disastrous and disproportionate effect on the industry. It would endanger the existence of the distribution system and undermine the market that is crucial to the distribution and demand for fish throughout the country. We are in a crucial situation which could have dire effects for Grimsby.

It is important to put to Ministers the concern that we all feel so strongly and passionately. I am amazed that, after the strong and passionate pleas for a decommissioning scheme that were made in each previous fishing debate, Ministers remain impervious to the argument. The Minister's defence of his failure to provide a decommissioning scheme was casuistry which might go down well in Convocation, for which it is better designed, but which cuts no ice with the fishermen because it defies common sense. If the Government were to provide a decommissioning scheme to cut the amount of effort, they would automatically provide for more effective and better conservation. That is essential.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Minister's case was that if one reduced the size of the fleet, there would be greater fishing effort and damage to conservation. By that token, the way in which he should help to reduce fishing effort is to have grants for new-built boats to increase the size of the fleet. It does not add up.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. If it is reduced to that ludicrous dimension, the illogicality of the Minister's argument becomes clear. It is wrong that, although on each occasion we have transmitted to him the strong demand of the industry, he has remained immune to the argument. It is also bad for our negotiating position and for the way in which the conservation measures apply to the industry. It would be ludicrous if the burden of the measures suggested by the Commission, such as the proposal for 10 consecutive closed days which would be disastrous for the industry, fell disproportionately on this country because we were lagging behind through our failure to provide a decommissioning scheme.

The Commission classifies nations participating in the common fisheries policy according to their compliance with the multi-annual guidance programme targets. Countries are classified from A to E. On that classification, we are E. Why is that? The reason is that we fail so disastrously to comply with the targets. For a long period now it has been envisaged that there should be a reduction of 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. per annum, so there should be a gradual reduction in effort. When we had a decommissioning scheme, we complied with that reduction of effort and the scheme got us within the targets. Since then, we have fallen behind. For various reasons, some of which are beyond the Minister's control—the number of quota hoppers has added to the pressures—we are 25 per cent. astray from our target.

We are the worst case in Europe. Even Spain, whose behaviour is monstrous in many respects and of whose approach I am a constant critic, is classified as D, whereas we are classified as E. Denmark, which has a good decommissioning scheme that works well and has substantially reduced the effort in a rational and predictable way, is classified as A. That puts us in a difficult position. It leads to the disproportionate application of conservation measures to this country and it isolates us from the concerted approach that fishing nations could take. Denmark may want to isolate us and

[Mr. Mitchell]

place the main burden of its criticism of demand on this country because Ministers have left us exposed by their failure to introduce a proper decommissioning scheme.

This is not a question merely of the casuistry that the Minister invoked. A vital national interest is being set back by a total failure to listen to the industry and by Ministers' incompetence in administering the previous scheme.

Ministers have also brought an undesirable fate to the industry through their attitude to the type of nets used. That point has been made by the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside and has been hammered home in each previous debate. There have been discussions about square mesh nets and their advantage over diamond mesh, which pulls out of shape. However, it is important that the work on square mesh panels should not be held back. There is a suspicion that the approach of the Ministry and of some research institutions that are prejudiced about square mesh panels has held back the argument. The Government have failed to advance research in this area, so we do not know exactly what the consequences are.

I have seen research that suggests that square mesh panels may have real benefits in catching bigger and, therefore, more marketable and better fish. I have also heard fishermen argue that that does not work with cod. They argue that as cod are lazy fish, they go into the net and do not try to get out. I cannot tell the truth of those arguments. I feel instinctively, from what I have read about square mesh panels, that they would give an enormous advantage, which we should be pursuing. It is the Government's responsibility to provide the documentation and the research to tell us. We need a clear argument to put before the Commission so that we do not have something imposed on us. We should put our argument on the advantages to the Commission and we should impose it on our industry so that we are in advance of the conservation game and not lagging plaintively behind, arguing among ourselves about 90 mm, 120 mm, 110 mm, or 100 mm mesh size, which the Government are secretly urging in the negotiations.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): The hon. Gentleman is doing less than justice to the work of British fishermen and of the Ministry. We have led research in the matter, but it has not been accepted in the Community. All the proposals put forward have a combination of diamond mesh and square mesh; the argument is whether it should be compulsory or voluntary. We believe that to get other countries to accept it, we should start with an optional approach on size. There is a genuine argument there. British fishermen have said that they want to have the option only of 80 mm square panels and a 90 mm mesh and that they want to leave the rest as it is. Entirely legally, a 90 mm square mesh panel could be introduced tomorrow morning. We must try to achieve an arrangement in the Community that will not only bring a positive gain in the conservation of fish, but will conserve the livelihood of fishermen.

The Commission's proposals will not achieve that aim. I agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) that the status quo is far too wasteful, so we must agree on a formula between the two. What the fishermen have asked us to negotiate is almost impossible. We must find a middle way. We are in the lead on this and we are recognised as being in the lead.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree with the Minister that we should make a clear decision. However, that decision could have been made some time ago as the arguments have been clear for a long time. It is ludicrous that we are arguing and bickering at this stage of the process when we could have anticipated events.

The Minister mentioned the research done by the industry. It is wrong that the onus of research should be placed on organisations such as the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and on the industry itself. It should have been done at Ministry level over a period so that we could now see the advantages, impose our proposals and have a clear case. A decision is needed. We do not need endless arguments about net size or about top and bottom panels. We need to be able to say something definite, so a decision must be taken. That is where the Government have delayed and let the industry down.

As I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall turn now to my main points. From a Grimsby point of view, it is absolutely vital that the Minister resists the reduction in TACs of cod. If they are cut from 105,000 tonnes to the proposed 90,000 tonnes, it will mean the immediate invocation of the Hague preference. That would be disastrous for Grimsby and we must be safeguarded from it. It would mean that fish was effectively being taken away from us and we would be put at a disadvantage compared with the ports along the arbitrary line that the Minister defined, beginning at Flamborough head, which bears no relation to the communities which depend on Grimsby's fishing and which should be allowed to participate in the debate if the Hague preference is to be invoked. The Minister should not allow the invocation of the Hague preference because it would not only be unfair to Grimsby; it would be disastrous.

The improvement in catches given to this country under the CAP was compensation for the fishing effort that was lost in Iceland. That fishing effort was conducted by vessels from Humberside. Since then, the increased catch has been taken mainly by Scottish vessels, which have been able to establish an historic track record, which Humberside does not have. However, Scotland has other advantages, such as the 12-mile limit. It would be absolutely wrong if we were now asked to suffer, through the Hague preference, to compensate Scottish vessels. It would be wrong because of Grimsby's good conservation record. We use 120 and 110 mm mesh, which is a good efficient method of conservation. Grimsby is a cod port which catches good, large, prime fish.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I was involved in this argument with the hon. Gentleman in our previous debate on this and I shall not get bogged down again.

We are a conservation-proud and conservation-conscious port. Moreover, unlike the Scottish industry, we pace our catches and quotas properly and fairly throughout the year. Our fishermen do not go out to grab as much as possible, thus producing the danger of a closure simply because of greed and grabbing too early in the year. Our conservation record should be recognised. There

should not be discrimination against Grimsby, such as the Hague preference would produce. We are a very good conservation port.

If conservation measures are introduced, such as the proposed 10 consecutive days in port, they should be applied on an individual track record basis, not on a blanket basis throughout the industry. An allocation allowance must be made for the mesh size that is used so that those vessels using the larger mesh size, such as those from Grimsby, are not faced with the same requirement for 10 closed consecutive days which those without the same conservation record are now to face. If that is applied to the main species, such as cod, haddock and whiting, it should exclude saithe and plaice. We need a better deal for saithe especially in relation to Norway. Ministers have neglected to take the opportunity of the improvement in those stocks in 1991. Although more will be available next year, Ministers have not achieved sufficient benefit for this country.

I remember the contempt with which we viewed horse mackerel when John Silkin came back to the House to announce that we had been given the consolation prize of an increase in the horse mackerel quota in 1978. That fish is now used for human consumption. It is therefore wrong that we should have national quotas out of which, because of their industrial fishing, the Danes will do well. That fish should be developed as a stock for human consumption.

My final point relates to discards, which are a real conservation problem. The Minister should consider seriously how to deal with this. The Scottish industry's discard record is appalling. One hears instances of vessels catching a number of boxes, but then seeing and catching a large amount of better fish and chucking the earlier inadequate fish over the side, thus adding to the discard problem. It is essential that we do something about discards. Given that discards are low in Grimsby, I suggest that all the fish that is caught should be returned and registered to quota. That would impose an effective discipline on the industry and would help us to tackle a problem that cannot be allowed to continue in such a way.

In conclusion, the prospects are poor. We need proper conservation. We need a decommissioning scheme and we need an orderly rundown in the industry in the face of the dire prospects if we are to survive in a coherent and concentrated form to inherit the better opportunties that will lie ahead.

8.55 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I join other right hon. and hon. Members in expressing sympathy, through the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), to her constituents who have lost relations in the dreadful tragedy. In the years that I have been a Member of the House, it has all too frequently been my sad duty to visit the relatives of fishermen who have been drowned. Indeed, I did so this summer. We all know the anguish that those relations go through, especially when the bodies have not been recovered from the sea. That is always an awful additional agony in such times of sadness.

In that connection, I refer to the work of an organisation that is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the House, the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. I always like to visit fishermen's relations in the company of the mission superintendent. Those of us who represent fishing constituencies know the tremendous work that that organisation does quietly and behind the scenes, especially in moments of tragedy, such as the one we mark tonight.

I make no apology for returning to an issue which has not featured greatly in the debate, although it was mentioned briefly by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I refer to the Spanish threat. All our fishermen face the possibility of the dreaded wretched quota-hoppers from Spain. We all dread the possibility that boats that are Spanish to all intents and purposes will start to come back—and some have already done so because of court rulings—in big numbers as a result of the case that starts in the European Court of Justice on 17 January.

I pay tribute to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench for all the work that they have done on this issue. The trouble is that the decisions so often lie with the Commission. Perhaps it is no coincidence—I make no point about it—that the Commissioner is a Spaniard. However, the outcome also lies with the decisions of the courts, both the European Court and our own. The sad fact is that we have so far lost several of the interim cases before the major case begins on 17 January. I hold firmly to the view that, whatever happens, this country and this Government must obey the rulings of the courts. I say that without equivocation, in whatever court the ruling is made.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), were good enough to meet a delegation of leaders of Cornish fishermen, which I accompanied, to talk about foreign quota-hoppers. I am sure that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend agree that there was some frank talking at that meeting. The Cornish fishermen are in the front line in facing the threat. What we cannot understand is how on earth we can have a common fisheries policy based on national quotas while foreign boats can fish against our quotas because of an accident of history and through several devices.

The essence of tonight's debate has been the pressure on our quotas. It is ludicrous and it drives a coach and horses through the common fisheries policy that foreign boats can fish against our quotas. I am afraid that if the vessels from Spain return to our waters and fish against our quotas in the numbers in which they did in the past, our industry, particularly in the south-west, will be devastated.

The pressure on quotas is already enormous. Yet the Commission says that foreign boats should be allowed to fish as though they were British boats, thereby devastating the British industry. That just does not make sense and Cornish fishermen in particular have every justification for being angry and bitter. Their livelihood is being threatened.

I pay tribute to the work done by the Government on quota-hoppers. I am delighted that the Solicitor-General himself will put the British case when the case begins in Luxembourg on 17 January. Quota-hopping by foreign boats is the greatest threat to our industry, but it takes place against the background of pressure on so many quotas—not least the pressure on quotas in the channel and the western approaches.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench, was good enough to refer to the cuts in some quotas. I reinforce what he said. I agreed with much of his speech.

[Mr. David Harris]

If the Commission's proposals are implemented, the cuts that will be made in area VII—the waters which mainly affect the south-west—for plaice and sole will be enormous. In area VIIe, part of the channel, we could face a cut in quota of almost 40 per cent. for sole. The combined effect of cuts in British total allowable catches —I should use that phrase, rather than the word quota —for plaice and sole in area VII could result in a loss of earnings of £6 million for sole and £12 million for plaice. That is big money by anyone's reckoning. Some of that could be offset by swaps with other countries and I hope that that would be the case.

In that connection—the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe drew attention to this—in certain areas it would be safe to increase the TAC and the quotas. I refer in particular to areas VIIh, VIIj and VIIk for sole. That would make a great difference and would help offset the difficulties which otherwise will undoubtedly face our fishermen.

Lastly—I, too, wish to be brief—I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister said in his opening remarks on deliberate misreporting. "Deliberate misreporting" is an euphemism. I have another word for it which I used in the previous debate on the matter. It is "cheating". In that debate about one month ago I said some harsh things about some Scottish fishermen. Those remarks have not been rebutted and I do not believe that they can be.

I wish to add to what I said and I do not do so with any sense of glee or pleasure. At my meeting with Ministers yesterday, certain information was given to them which had already been given to officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about a Scottish boat which landed its catch in Peterhead on 3 December. I am told that that catch was recorded as having been caught in area VII—the area of sea off south-west Ireland. It is alleged—I do not have the proof—that the catch was made some 140 miles north-east of Peterhead. I am deliberately not mentioning the boat's name because it would be unfair and irresponsible to do so under privilege when the Ministry's officials and Ministers have been given it. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment as Secretary of State for Scotland and ask him to establish where those fish were caught.

Mr. Salmond: I have told the hon. Gentleman previously that Members who represent fishing constituencies should not spend their time in debates attacking other fishing constituencies. If he has evidence, he should forward it to the appropriate authorities. Does he realise that the whole fishing industry is awash with rumours? Trawlers from the south-west of England have been spending their time fishing in the English channel and reporting that they have been on the Irish sea. Anyone can make allegations. Has the hon. Gentleman investigated those allegations or done anything about them? Is he even aware of them?

Mr. Harris: I have done precisely what the hon. Gentleman urges. I know that the information has been made available to officials and Ministers. *[Interruption.]* Tonight I am asking for an assurance that that information is being fully investigated with the owners and operators of that particular boat.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is showing his ignorance of the law.

Mr. Harris: Hon. Gentlemen are getting touchy about the subject and I can understand why.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): If the hon. Gentleman has any information of that kind, he should direct it to the office of the procurator fiscal at Peterhead. If the law has been broken, it is not for those sitting on the Treasury Bench to seek to enforce it, but for the appropriate authority in Scotland.

Mr. Harris: The information has been relayed to the Ministry and, I believe, to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland because the licence for area VIIk under which the boat operated was issued, not by the procurator fiscal, but by DAFS. Therefore, DAFS has a responsibility for ensuring that the fish were caught in that area. Unlike the hon. and learned Gentleman, I am not a lawyer, but that is why the Ministry and the Department have a direct responsibility to get to the bottom of the matter.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it would be most unfortunate if this were presented as a Scotland-England issue? Does he accept that tonight I was speaking to fishermen's representatives from the west coast of Scotland who were anxious that precisely the same point should be made in east-west terms? I hope that every hon. Member and every party will unconditionally condemn misreporting and non-reporting.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He and hon. Members who are protesting and seem to be sensitive on this issue will remember that a month ago when I raised similar cases I had the support not just of Labour Members but of a Northern Ireland Member who virtually repeated word for word the allegation that I have made.

There has undoubtedly been cheating on a massive scale. The trouble is that this is a double-edged knife. On the one hand, it exhausts more quickly quotas which would normally be fished by fishermen from the south-west and other parts of the United Kingdom. On the other hand, as my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned, unless remedial steps are taken against cheating, fishermen who are cheating are building up an unfair track record for the future.

With respect to hon. Members, this is not just a matter for prosecution, but one of direct concern for the fishing departments of MAFF, DAFS and Northern Ireland. For that reason, I welcome what my right hon. Friend said. I have confidence that he will ensure that the practice of misreporting is brought to an end rapidly.

9.9 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I beg to move, in line 11, to leave out from "and" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"demands that the Government now display some commitment to this vital resource industry and pursue a more vigorous policy in the fisheries negotiations by insisting on implementation of the technical conservation measures on square mesh panels agreed by fishermen and supported by sea trials, rejecting the discriminatory and unworkable proposals on limitation of effort proposed by the EC Commission, moving away from the restriction of catches for human

consumption to the elimination of industrial fishing, and recognising that the fishing industry is entitled to the structural support enjoyed by virtually every other fleet in Europe.".

This debate takes place against the background of the loss of the Premier. That loss is relevant to the debate because all hon. Members should be reminded of the enormous dangers that fishermen face every time they go to sea. It also places an obligation on all of us to do whatever we can to relieve at least the economic pressures on the industry.

I was disturbed at some of the remarks of the Minister, who seemed to adopt a relatively complacent attitude to the extent of the financial problems of the fishing industry. If we had net income figures for the fishing industry, in the same way as we have for farming, they would show an altogether different picture from that of the crude revenue base on which the Minister is proceeding. Costs in the industry have escalated dramatically as a result of high interest payments and the cost of capital equipment—boats and gear. Recently fuel costs have more than doubled. At this time of year boats have to go further afield to fish and those fuel charges become an ever-increasing element of overall costs.

In the past year the economic crisis facing the industry has not lessened. It has been transported onshore and its impact is being felt through high prices in the processing sector. That has had an effect on the processing companies and their workers, many of whom earn under £100 a week. In my constituency many of those workers have not received any wage increase this year. If Ministers swapped places with fish processing workers they would realise that there is a crisis in the fishing industry and they would appreciate the economic conditions that those people face. Let us not be complacent about the extent of the financial problems.

In the light of the two fishing tragedies of recent weeks, it would be inconceivable if there was any support in the House for a system of effort limitation as it would inevitably increase the dangers faced by fishermen. A 10 consecutive day system would do just that because if boats were in port for 10 fine days there would be a greater pressure to go to sea for the remaining 20 days of the month, regardless of the weather conditions. Some people may believe that effort limitation is a valid proposal, but it would be wrong for the House to support it in this form.

Given the Minister's well-known religious interests, I hope that he understands that the proposal would trespass on the religious convictions of those who will not go to sea on Sunday. It would intefere with the fishing pattern that has been established by many of my constituents over many generations. I hope that that will be borne in mind by the Government.

We are all committed to do whatever we can to decrease the inevitable dangers faced by fishermen. At the moment pelagic species must be landed at Ullapool and I am aware of two fully laden boats that had to turn back from that port because of adverse weather conditions. I hope that Ministers will bear it in mind that if a more flexible policy was introduced for the pelagic sector it might make matters safer for fishermen.

Boats from Fraserburgh, Peterhead and elsewhere in my constituency have probably spent the past three days sheltering near Orkney against the adverse weather. If circumstances changed and they had to do 10 consecutive days—if they had overstayed their time at sea and were going into their compulsory lay-up period—they would now be faced with the prospect, having run the risk of being at sea, of having to sail directly back to their home ports to be able to start their 10 consecutive days at home. That is not a workable system and I do not believe that it will be accepted by the industry. I hope that it will be rejected out of hand in the negotiations in the Community later in the week.

I was in some confusion during the Minister's speech to know whether he was attacking the amendment because he disagreed with it or whether—as seemed to be the case later in his speech—he was attacking it because he agreed with it. He seemed to advance a bizarre series of arguments. I took comfort from that because I believe that fundamentally he could not see anything wrong with the amendment as he tried to resist it.

I will deal with the points made in the amendment so that the Minister appreciates fully what we are getting at. I have dealt with limitation of effort. Next, we are arguing for technical measures. We are on the brink of an enormous step forward in the fishing industry. The proposal for the 90 mm mesh size, with the 80 mm square mesh panel above the cod end, is greeted enthusiastically by the fishermen. It has been tested in sea trials and, as the Government are aware, the results have been dramatic in terms of discards and allowing smaller, immature fish to escape alive. There has been a 31 per cent. increase in the escape of haddock and a 46 per cent. increase in the escape of whiting. There is substantial evidence to show that that proposal would bring about what we all want—a reduction in the number of fish discarded dead into the sea. It would allow small, immature fish a chance to escape alive and in good condition. We are on the brink of a major breakthrough.

That is why it would be disappointing if the Government were about to retreat from that proposal, which is backed by scientific evidence and which Ministers have told me privately they support. They accept that it is the best way technically to manage mixed fishing in the North sea. It would be disappointing if that opportunity were lost in some fudged compromise involving the ridiculous proposal of 120 mm that has come from the European Commission.

Mr. Curry: Perhaps I might spell out the position for the hon. Gentleman; I do not want to polemicise it. We understand that the industry would prefer a 90 mm diamond with an 80 mm square panel. I tried to obtain that at the previous Fisheries Council meeting, but there was no support for it. Nor was there support for the Marin proposal. That is dead in the water, and will remain so. The Commission is now arguing for a 110 mm mesh and it will be difficult to head off a majority on that.

I will obtain the best possible deal for the fishing industry, and I wish the House to be clear about the position because I do not want to deceive anybody. The proposal that the fishermen endorse is regarded as very minimalist, and I believe that it would be difficult to obtain. Nothing stops them putting a 90 mm square panel in the existing mesh, and of course the higher one goes the better the spin-off. There is a problem over livelihood—I recognise that dilemma—and it must be dealt with.

Mr. Salmond: That intervention suggests that the Government are backing off the 90-80 formulation which has been greeted with enthusiasm by the industry. The

[Mr. Salmond]

great advantage of having a conservation measure that is backed by the industry is that it has the best possible chance of being put into practice. That is what we are on the threshold of achieving, but the Government seem to be backing off.

I understand what the Minister said about resistance among other Community members, but if he were more amenable to structural policies and a decommissioning scheme all sorts of things would become possible in the fishery negotiations. If the Minister and the Government negotiators continue to be obdurate, it is hardly surprising that they get no sympathy from other European delegates when it comes to negotiating over technical measures.

Earlier, the Minister said that he thought that the policy of low quotas had been relatively successful. I think that the policy has failed. Setting ever-lower quotas means that the industry ends up chasing its tail. Lower and lower quotas cannot work because we are setting single species quotas in a mixed fishery, so it is inevitable that one species of fish will run out before the quota of another runs out. That means that there are bound to be discards.

I know that the public finds this difficult to understand, but it is absolutely legal to discard dead fish in the North sea and it is illegal to land those fish once they have been caught. It is ridiculous, but that is the inevitable result of the present quotas. They cannot work because of their vulnerability to discarding, which is the real enemy of fishermen, of conservation and of progress in policy in the future.

I hope that Ministers will accept that the emphasis in fisheries policy must move to technical conservation measures, when they are established; but I also hope that they will agree that it is idiotic and obscene to set quota levels for fish for human consumption so low when there has been an increase in industrial fishing in the North sea. The Minister told us that he had opposed industrial fishing for a long time, so I was moved to check some statistics to see what had been the impact of his opposition on industrial catch levels in the North sea.

My statistics, for estimated trawl fishery landings from the North sea, are from the past three years and are taken from a parliamentary reply by the present Secretary of State for Scotland on 16 July this year. In 1987, 1,106,000 tonnes of industrial fishery was landed from the North sea alone. In 1988, the figure was 1,349,000 tonnes, and in 1989, 1,483,000 tonnes—mostly, as we all know, landed by Danish and Dutch fleets. So in the very years when increased pressure has been put on fisheries for human consumption, for which the quotas have been dramatically lowered, industrial fishing in the North sea has increased. If that is the result of the Minister's trenchant opposition to industrial fishing, I should have hated to see what would have happened had he not entered negotiations arguing against it.

We know from previous fishing debates that industrial fishing has never been discussed as a specific policy item at Council meetings. When will this obscenity be tackled? Millions of tonnes of small fish, pout and sand-eels, are taken from the North sea—the feed stock and foodstuff of a future fishery. Meanwhile, fish for human consumption is allowed to be taken only at levels so low as to be almost untenable.

Our amendment refers to structural measures—not only to decommissioning but to temporary lay-up measures, of which some Community countries, particularly Spain, have taken advantage. In 1987, 1988 and 1989, 50 million, 30 million and 6 million ecu—I am not sure whether hard or not—have been spent on lay-up schemes and have mostly gone to Spain. Thirty-seven million ecu, 49 million ecu and 45 million ecu respectively for the same years have gone on decommissioning, mostly to the Danes and Dutch. That amounts to a total of £150 million in structural support over these three years, of which the United Kingdom's share has been zero because of the Government's obdurate opposition to structural measures.

Regardless of the Minister's embarrassment at presiding over a failed decommissioning scheme six years ago, surely we cannot allow our fishing industry to face competition from other European fleets at such a massive and major disadvantage. By all means let us have a better decommissioning scheme than the one that sent many millions of pounds sailing up the Humber about six years ago. A common sense flexible scheme would allow some reduction in fishing capacity, some amelioration of the problem and progress towards meeting the guidance targets.

Those are the three points in the amendment, and my hon. Friends and I will force the issue to a vote. However, having heard the explanation perhaps the Minister will accept our amendment. Failing that, and given the special characteristics of this industry, I am sure that the Minister understands that hon. Members from fishing constituencies must vigorously represent this industry. We inherited the cause in our constituencies. In the winding-up speech I should like to hear some concessions to the important, positive and constructive arguments that have been advanced on behalf of fishermen.

9.26 pm

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that hon. Members who represent fishing ports strongly support their fishermen, who play an important part in their constituencies. Time is running short, so I shall be brief.

Happily, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) is back with us for the debate. I well remember when he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) presented an agreement to the House. That was a good agreement and greatly favoured our fishing industry. Ministers are doing a first-class job in Brussels on behalf of our people. Sometimes the results have not been what we would have wished, but we are fortunate to have such competent Ministers representing us in negotiations, which my fishermen are carefully following.

Quotas have been lowered each year and are now at a critical level. I was glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food assure us that any further reduction in the quotas would be kept to a minimum. That is right because we must look not only to the future of the fish but to the future of fishermen and their industry.

Secondly, I was glad to hear about the positive conservation measures that have been taken by the industry. My fishermen have engaged in such experiments

and I hope that their experience will be taken into account. The system of 10 consecutive days of non-fishing produces greater hardship for fishermen than the mathematical calculations suggest. Fishermen, and especially those who work on the north-east coast, have to contend with changeable and dangerous conditions and need to be able to time their fishing operations if they are to be successful. I hope that that will be taken fully into account in the negotiations. I welcome what my right hon. Friend said in his opening remarks, and I wish him well in the negotiations next week.

9.29 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I extend my condolences to the bereaved families of the Premier. All of us who have many close connections with the fishing industry, through either our constituencies or families, never become inured to sadness as each winter goes by and we lose a vessel, with the disappearance of a whole crew or a part crew, as the men are washed over the side. During the bitter winter months we have a constant concern for those who sail our seas to find a living. That feeling unites all of us in the House.

When the Minister began his speech he properly paid tribute to those who have suffered. However, I regret that the memory of the combination of forces faded quickly from his mind, and when he reached the substance of his speech he appeared to have a complete lapse of memory. He seems to have forgotten that the Conservative party leadership has changed. Stridency and haranguing are out of the window. We are supposed to be having the quieter, caring approach nowadays. This criticism may appear trivial to some, but if, whenever a criticism is made or a doubt cast on something in the Minister's speech or in the technical papers, he regards that in a party political sense, he will do the fishing industry no good.

I have taken part in these debates for almost 20 years, and it has long been the tradition to seek to send the Minister to the negotiations carrying the House with him, and the Minister has almost always sought that too. It has seldom been necessary to force Divisions. Ministers have usually taken the depth and strength of feeling in criticisms with them as a bargaining point on their side, instead of discounting them as if we did not care about what happens.

I am always irritated when the Minister sits and gossips instead of listening to the debate. He should bear it in mind that we are trying to ensure that we obtain the best possible deal for our constituents and the industry. The Minister went too far when he said that we were trying to give the fishermen a soft option, trying to buy votes. That is an insult to all fishermen. Anyone who promised that quotas and TACs would be increased and that fishermen could catch all the fish that they liked would be laughed at. Anyone who thought that he could get a vote that way would be considered crazy and no one would vote for him.

It is easy to try to make the soft option, but I think that I am speaking for most hon. Members when I say that the soft option has not been put. It has been hard work to get the fishing industry to come to terms with the problems of conservation and the amount of fish being taken out of the sea. What worries me is that we are told that we must accept the scientific advice, the reduction of quotas and TACs, but the problem is that that does not seem to be working. Each year, we find reduction after reduction. I am not suggesting that reductions should not be made, and they probably will have to be accepted, but there seems to be less concentration on the scientific reasons for the lowering of the age of the stocks, and we need to know more about that aspect.

It is a bit much for the Minister to pray in aid scientific evidence in some regards, but then to acquiesce in respect of restrictions such as spending 10 consecutive days in port or on mesh sizes, when there is no scientific evidence for such measures. Nothing has been produced to show that 10 consecutive days of tie-up will work. It could be extremely dangerous to tackle the problem in that way. I am not persuaded that it is a good idea, and do not even understand how it would work. Would those 10 consecutive days run from the first of the month to the 10th of the month, or could people choose which 10 consecutive days they were? Will there have to be a 20-day gap between tie-up periods? That has not been explained, and we need to know.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to my hon. and old Friend for allowing me to intervene. May we have confirmation that those 10 consecutive days will include Saturdays and Sundays, and that they will not be 10 consecutive working days at sea, including steaming days? Will the period in fact comprise six working days plus four weekend days?

Mr. Hughes: Perhaps I should have asked my hon. Friend earlier whether weekends are included, and if there is to be some flexibility. I might have been given the right answer. We have not received an explanation from the Government.

If scientific evidence is to be used for one argument, it should be used for the other. There is overwhelming scientific evidence against using a 120 mm mesh, and to show that the fishermen's proposals can work. The Minister must put all the scientific evidence to the Commission.

I abhor cheating, as does every honest fisherman. I hope that there will be no division in the House, with people getting too touchy over allegations about Peterhead, Humberside or Cornwall fishermen. Such allegations should be done away with for ever. Fishing communities share tragedy, but when it comes to arguments about who does this or that, blame is always placed on fishermen who are 100, 200 or 300 miles away. We must stamp out cheating, and if we discover that our own constituents have been guilty of it, we must come down on them equally hard and not seek to defend them.

The Minister must address the decommissioning issue, for it is not good enough for him to say, because his Department made a mess of the previous scheme, that it was taken to the cleaners or ripped off, or whatever other phrase he chooses—and that as a consequence, there must never be another decommissioning scheme. Instead, we should learn from the lessons of the past.

One of the complaints that I received was that under the previous scheme fishermen did not receive a ha'penny. The Minister claims that the money goes back into the industry, but I do not think that that is true. It will probably go into the bankers' pockets, where it has always gone. It is problematical who will really benefit if the scheme is not properly worked out. However, if catching capacity is reduced in a strategic and planned way, that will help quota management. It must be done in that way.

[Mr. Hughes]

Fishermen do not like regulations or planning, but they are beginning to accept that they are necessary because otherwise their livelihoods will disappear. They like even less the threat of fleet restructuring and decommissioning, with boats going out of the fishing effort in a war of attrition and bankruptcy. When he was Chancellor, the Prime Minister said, "If it ain't hurting, it ain't working." I hope to goodness that people realise that that is not the way to treat the fishing industry. We want proper restructuring and proper assessment. I also hope that, although tonight we are primarily discussing TACs, the problems facing the processors on the land will not be forgotten.

My final plea is for a day when we can discuss the industry properly, free from the pressures of time and without having to argue about TAC.

9.40 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Despite the robust comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, all the evidence available to me suggests that, for the south-west, the current fishing year has not been as good as 1989. Furthermore, if the Commission's proposals for TACs and quotas for 1991 were implemented in their existing form, there is no doubt that the south-west fishery would experience real problems, with adverse repercussions for the regional economy as well as for fishermen and ancillary activities.

The problem does not end there, however. As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, in a closely knit community there is an inter-relationship between fishing and other economic activities. In the far south-west, there is an interplay between tourism and fishing. One of the reasons why people go on holiday to isolated peripheral parts of the United Kingdom such as Looe, Polperro and Fowey in my constituency is the fact that the harbours are alive. There is the movement of boats, the landing of fish, the auctioning and the mending of the nets, all of which are of great interest to the visitor. If fishing were taken away, those harbours would cease to be alive.

I recognise the fundamental problems that face United Kingdom Ministers. As we all realise, fish stocks are declining; we have a surplus catching capacity, and we have to deal with overfishing in some areas. As a consequence, we must exercise restraint if we are to maintain effective conservation measures and safeguard the viability of our fishing industry.

I have three detailed points to make about the effect that the draft proposals would have, if implemented, on Devon and Cornwall. The first relates to the TACs, and United Kingdom quotas in particular, for cod, whiting, plaice and sole. The sole quota in area VIIe would be reduced by 44 per cent., and the plaice quota by 18 per cent. Although the figures do not seem high in terms of tonnages, I assure the Ministers that in financial terms they represent significant reductions in value, and thus in fishermen's incomes. The suggested reductions in the whiting and cod quotas are 29 per cent. and 19 per cent. respectively.

I acknowledge that those figures are provisional; there will be negotiation at the Fisheries Council next week and there will be some room for manoeuvre in the context of quota swaps, particularly with the Dutch. Overall, however, the trend will be unfavourable if major modifications are not obtained.

That brings me to my second point—the basis of the scientific assessments for the determination of TACs. These are based on limited analytical data that are susceptible to error and variable interpretation. I hope that where there is a variation in the scientific evidence, Ministers will argue for the higher parameter.

In this debate last year I argued in support of greater flexibility in the application of quotas. Circumstances change during the course of any single fishing year. I believe that if there is ample scientific evidence and local knowledge to support an enhanced quota during the year, there should be a procedure that can be implemented without, in effect, having to renegotiate the TACs and quotas.

In the context of conservation, I wish to mention mesh types and sizes. Many hon. Members have already referred to that. South-west fishermen have long advocated larger mesh sizes. The present situation is ludicrous as many small fish are caught and, subsequently, dumped. Small fish represent not only future fish stocks and the viability of the industry but the future livelihood of our fishermen.

It would be remiss of me not to remind hon. Members and Ministers of the potential threat of competition from over 100 Spanish quota-hopping fishing vessels should the decision of the European Court go against the United Kingdom. That is a real worry to our local fishermen since the fish-catching capacity would be enhanced out of all proportion to the quantity of fish available in the south-west fishery. Such a development would have serious consequences for the south-west fishing industry.

Looe is the principal fishing port in my constituency. It supports over 50 fishing vessels—a significant increase since 1980. In the past three years alone over £1 million has been invested in landing facilities, including a fish market and a packaging scheme. Larger sums have been invested in our fishing fleet. I want that momentum to be maintained. We look to our right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to safeguard those interests in Brussels next week and in the wider European forum.

9.47 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Like many other right hon. and hon. Members, may I, on behalf of my hon. Friends, extend, through the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), our condolences to the families of those bereaved in the fishing tragedy yesterday? As many hon. Members have said, those of us who represent fishing constituencies know that the communities are brought together when tragedies such as this happen. I know that that will be the case in the fishing communities in my constituency. Today, we also remember the community in Carradale where my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has been with those who are burying their dead after the tragedy last month.

This has been a vigorous debate, as it should be in the week before Ministers go to Brussels to negotiate what will effectively be the shape and structure of the fishing industry in 1991. I share the view of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) who expressed disappointment at the fact that because we were not going to line up neatly behind the Minister, he would automatically be offended and go on to a political attack. If some points

seem to be uniting the Opposition and some of his hon. Friends—the eloquent and knowledgeable right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) shares some of the views expressed by Opposition Members—perhaps the Minister should take time to consider what we are saying. As representatives of constituencies with substantial fishing interests, we try to make it part of our business to find out what the fishermen are thinking and what their concerns are. The Minister should be in no doubt that the message that we are receiving from them is that they are not satisfied with the way in which things have been going or with some of the more controversial proposals on the table for discussion in Brussels next week.

I shall try, as briefly as possible, to go through the points that arise from the total allowable catches. The first is the agreement that was initialled last week with Norway. Every year, the precise status of that agreement is raised. Every year, Norway tries to get more western mackerel, which appears to be conceded by the Commission, but not necessarily be member states. By the time that Ministers consider it at the Council of Ministers, it is virtually a fait accompli, and on that basis they must share out the remaining stocks.

The right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside made the important point that the scientific advice for North sea mackerel is that the catch should be nil. This year, the amount agreed for western mackerel is higher than the scientists' recommendation. The scientific advice has been ignored for political reasons. That should be borne in mind when Ministers use the phrase, "We must abide by the scientific advice", as a defence for other TACs.

The one saving factor, as the Minister said, is the flexibility to take some of that western mackerel east of the 4 deg. west line. My understanding is that the Community and Norway have agreed to 60,000 tonnes being taken. Last year, although it was agreed with Norway, the Council of Ministers scaled it down. Does the Minister foresee that happening again? The pelagic fishermen in my constituency hope that as 60,000 tonnes has been agreed with Norway the Community will agree to it.

On North sea cod and haddock TACs, I noted that the Minister said that, if necessary—it would appear necessary from the figures before us—the Government would invoke the Hague preference. If it is necessary to do so, they will have our support. Will it be possible to agree a TAC for North sea cod that makes it unnecessary to invoke the Hague preference? The industry feels that that would be a better way of proceeding.

If my figures for east and west catches are right, there will be an 8 per cent. reduction in the quota for saithe. I am advised that the Norwegian effort in the fishing of saithe has been considerably reduced, and the possibility of our taking up the slack that the Norwegians have allowed us would be welcome, particularly to the industry in England.

For the west coast, the Minister said that the Government would probably have to invoke the Hague preference for whiting and saithe. What is the position of the Hague preference with regard to haddock? In 1990, the west coast haddock TAC was 14,000 tonnes in area VIa and 10,000 tonnnes in area VIb, making a total of 24,000 tonnes, but now the total for the two areas is down to 13,000 tonnes. In other words, 11,000 tonnes has been knocked off a TAC of 24,000 tonnes, which is a substantial amount. Given such variations, not least reductions, fishermen find it difficult to believe the scientific advice and wonder why it can be at one level in one year but so dramatically different the next.

The debate on mesh sizes has flowed backwards and forwards. As the Minister well knows, the industry's preference is an 80 mm square mesh panel with a 90 mm diamond mesh. The industry was pleased that the 120 mm mesh size seemed to be well and truly ruled out; there was a broad range of opinion against that. We heard something which, until this evening, the industry had not heard directly from the Government: the Parliamentary Secretary seemed to say that it is unlikely that the British Government will be able to stand by a negotiating position of the 80 mm square panel and 90 mm diamond net. That must come as a great disappointment to the industry. It may feel that the Government have not been batting as hard on this wicket as they might have reasonably been expected to. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) put it well. Because the Government have been so reluctant to go down any road towards a structured policy introducing decommissioning, the Commission has to get back at British industry in some other way, so we have no friends when we want to put forward a proposal.

By using videos and going on journeys, representatives of the industry have tried to show that this is a sensible conservation measure. I understand that it is easy in negotiations to compromise on size issues. But we are talking not just about size but about selectivity. Skippers such as Charlie Dawson, the chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, and John Garrioch from my constituency have shown that their method is more effective in reducing discards. Hon. Members agree that that, perhaps more than anything else, must be achieved. It also retains more marketable fish. The Minister should not give up on that position. He appears already, before the negotiations, to have conceded. What has he been doing since last month to win round friends from other member states? Have representatives of other nations seen the videos and the evidence which our fishermen produced? There will be great disappointment if the pass is sold before Ministers reach Brussels.

The proposal that fishermen should stay 10 consecutive days a month ashore is one of the main controversial issues of the debate. I asked the Minister what the Government's position was, but his reply was not particularly clear. If I used the wrong terminology, I apologise, although I was not aware that I did. I was referring to part of the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Moray and her hon. Friends with which the Minister was dealing at the time. The amendment criticised

"unworkable proposals on the limitation of effort proposed by the EC Commission."

That is what I thought the measure was. The Minister asked why an amendment to that effect should have to be tabled and said that he agreed. I asked him whether he opposed the idea of 10 consecutive days ashore, but did not receive a direct reply. The Minister owes it to the industry to say what the position will be. Is he in favour of the Commission proposal or not? I should willingly give way to him, but he does not seem to want to make the position clear. As hon. Members said, we are increasingly putting pressure on fishermen to fish when they would much rather stay ashore. This may not be the most sensitive of occasions on which to dwell on that point at length, but the House knows the issue.

[Mr. James Wallace]

What thought has been given to the consequences for processors? Will the Government rely on the industry sorting itself out in some way to provide a steady flow of fish during the month, or will there be a glut in some parts of the month and a shortage in others, affecting the price received by those who land the fish?

Not surprisingly, the subject of decommissioning has played a large part in the debate. Many people in the industry have told me and, no doubt, other hon. Members that they see the common fisheries policy as a whole. There are technical conservation measures in one part—a means of limiting the number of fish caught and efforts aimed at conservation. There is also a structures policy. The Government seem to adhere, no doubt rightly, to part of the policy but they totally ignore others. The United Kingdom's fishing industry has to suffer for their omissions.

The Minister argued against decommissioning and told us repeatedly that the previous decommissioning scheme was roundly criticised by the Public Accounts Committee. I understand his sensitivity because he was then one of the junior Ministers responsible for devising the scheme. As the hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw), a member of the Public Accounts Committee, said, it did not rule out other effective decommissioning schemes.

We then heard the argument that a decommissioning scheme would not be effective and that we could not target it. Other European countries manage to target it. In Europe, age, horse power and tonnage are relevant factors. The younger the vessel, the bigger the horse power and the bigger the capacity, the greater is the amount received for decommissioning. The Government have been so intransigent about decommissioning that they have never entered discussions with the industry to see whether there can be effective targeting of decommissioning. I urge them to rethink their position.

We heard a novel point this evening. The Minister said that if we took some capacity out, other vessels would tend to fish harder, so no net benefit would acrue. The right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside dealt with that point exceptionally well. We are talking about——

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings.*

MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates), to put forthwith the deferred Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings on Supplementary Estimates 1990-91 (Class IV, Vote 2).*

CLASS IV, VOTE 2

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £14,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1991 for expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection and administration.

MR. SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question which he was directed to put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of Estimates, &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1990-91

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £4,746,691,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for defence and civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1991, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 6 and 76 of Session 1990-91.

ESTIMATES 1991-92 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £63,981,165,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 1992 as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 7, 8 and 9 of Session 1990-91.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. John Maples and Mr. David Lightbown.

Mr. Francis Maude accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1991 and 1992: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 14].

Fisheries

Question again proposed.

Mr. Wallace: I will continue after that commercial break, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, it does not follow that if one takes some boats out of the fleet, other boats would automatically make up the difference. As the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside said, no one is proposing a decommissioning scheme while abandoning all other means of conservation. We are striving for better management of the relatively smaller stocks that are available. That might mean that some vessels, boat owners and crews will be able to sustain a better livelihood after decommissioning than is the case at present. There is no doubt that, at present, too much capacity is chasing fewer and fewer stocks.

It seems that bankruptcy is the Government's only instrument for trying to reduce the capacity of the fleet. Aggregation, to which my fishermen do not object, does not appear to have made a great impact on the problem. The Government should be in no doubt that, for those of us who represent fishing constituencies, bankruptcy is not an acceptable instrument of policy.

The Minister said, rightly, that we want a policy that will ensure that there are fish to be caught in the seas not only next year, but for many years to come. However, it is also important to ensure that there are still fishing communities and fishermen who are able to go out to sea to seek those stocks.

10.3 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): May I add my condolences to those hon. Members who represent constituencies that have lost fishermen in the past few weeks? It shows the high price that is paid by our fishing communities.

At one time, my constituency was a strong fishing community and experienced similar losses, but its main importance now is as a fish market and as the centre for Scotland's fish processing trade. It is one of the United Kingdom's leading fish processing centres. It is important to consider the consequences of the decisions that are being discussed in terms of the fish processing industry because those consequences are not limited to the catches only. Fish processors deserve our attention.

First, however, I should like to follow the point that was made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and to refer to the Minister's attitude to the debate. I was a wee bit disappointed that he did not follow the precedent that he set last year in his first year at the Dispatch Box on this matter. Before that debate, he called all hon Members who represent fishing constituencies to a private meeting at which he explained the Government's position on various aspects of the debate. We had a worthwhile and useful discussion beforehand. That helped to bring people together, which I believe is what the Minister intended. Today, however, he is taking a much more confrontational line, which is a matter of some regret, certainly to Opposition Members.

At the beginning of this year, 5,200 people in the north-east of Scotland worked in the fish processing industry. During the past year, we have lost 750 jobs and 14 firms have closed. We are now down to 4,500 employees.

Obviously, the fish processing industry depends on the fish catchers providing the supplies. I must express my extreme concern about the way in which the 10-days-per-month compulsory lay-off will affect the fish processors. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also referred to this point. I am not clear about whether the compulsory lay-off is to be across the board, whether there is to be no fishing on particular days or whether the restriction will be applied to individual ports. A daily intake of fish is absolutely necessary not only to my consituents who work in the fish processing industry, but to the consumer. It is crucial that that point is addressed and that we know exactly where we are.

It is worth considering what the fish processing industry —certainly in my constituency—has had to cope with in the past few years. I got some figures today which show that, in 1988, fish processors in the United Kingdom had access to 50,000 boxes of fish per week. In 1989, with the reduction in the quota, that had reduced to 22,000 boxes per week and had reduced again last year to 14,000 boxes. We are looking at further cuts this year.

The industry has been encouraged to change dramatically. In 1992, we are expecting new food hygiene and food handling regulations, which will be imposed on a Europewide basis. A lot of work is being done by the industry—I know, because I meet the fish processors in my constituency—to ensure that it can comply with the regulations in 1992. However, when the processors are faced with a reduction in their basic raw material, it is difficult for them to make the planned investment that is necessary if they are to meet and to cope with the regulations and, at the same time, continue to provide the high quality of fish that the consumer is entitled to expect.

Fish processors have another problem. All sorts of rumours are circulating about how the regulations will be imposed. I spoke today to Scottish fish merchants and processors; it is clear that they are uncertain about the requirements that will be imposed upon them. It has been suggested that there may be a phasing-in period in some areas. I should be grateful if the Secretary of State for Scotland could clarify that matter, because we need to know whether the new food hygiene regulations—I know that they are not before the House—are to be imposed with immediate effect on 1 January 1993, or whether there will be a phasing-in period so that people such as my constituents can prepare and adjust much more slowly.

The best processors—those who take the most businesslike attitude and those who care most about their product—are planning their investment now for 1 January 1993. They are worried that they will be left behind. Those who are slower to invest and those who wait to see how the regulations will affect them will steal quite a march on those who care and take the trouble to make that investment.

The fish processing industry faces serious problems and we do not want Government indecision on them on top of that. I would appreciate it if the Minister would clarify the point about investment. Investment in the fish processing industry is a crucial question which must be addressed.

We heard a great deal from the Minister tonight about the extra revenue which fish catchers have enjoyed this year. Of course, when there is much less fish on the market, the price goes up. That has its consequences on the fish

[Mr. Frank Doran]

processors. Prices at the quayside in the north-east of Scotland have increased by some 33 per cent. this year. That is 33 per cent. extra money which the fish processors have to find. Their cash flow is much more restricted than that in most other industries, but the retail price for fish once it is processed has increased by only 14 per cent., so fish processors are living within much tighter margins and are suffering seriously.

I am aware that the Scottish fish processors—the merchants—approached the Minister with a plea for assistance in adapting to the imposition of the new food hygiene regulations. The industry wants to improve and modernise and to have facilities which are as up to date, clean and hygienic as possible, but in these times it is difficult for them to make the adjustment. They applied for assistance and went to see the Minister, but they were rebuffed. The attitude taken was the same as that taken by the Minister today on decommissioning.

Some fundamental questions need to be asked about the Government's attitude. Fish is a food. It is a healthy food and one which people want to buy. People are encouraged to consume it. We should do everything possible to encourage fish consumption, yet it strikes me that exactly the opposite is happening. The price of fish in the supermarkets has increased dramatically. It is now almost as expensive as the best steak. I find that difficult to reconcile with the attitude of the Government when they wear another hat. Through the Department of Health and the Home and Health Department in Scotland, they encourage healthy eating. Poorer families certainly cannot afford to buy fish fresh from the fishmongers or the supermarket. That has happened simply because of the Government's lack of planning and their failure to make proper arrangements to ensure that the market is supported in exactly the same way as the food industry.

Fishermen like to contrast their position with that of the farmers, and they are right. Farmers are encouraged and subsidised to produce, because their product is seen as absolutely essential to the well-being of the nation. We cannot afford to go into too much deficit in food production. I cannot understand why fishermen are not treated in the same way.

We have surpluses in beef, milk and grain. I cannot understand why farmers are given the benefit of buy-in and set-aside schemes to encourage the removal of large acreages from production when fishermen do not benefit from such schemes. In the same way, we have argued tonight that vessels should be removed from fish catching. The analogies are too good to miss for the fishermen, and I sympathise with them. I do not understand why the Minister refuses to acknowledge the points made by not only Opposition but Conservative Members. They are genuine points, which reflect the genuine anxieties of our constituents.

It does the Minister no credit to hark back to previous bad experiences. If the Government got it wrong in the past, surely they can learn from their experiences and work a little harder to get it right now. It is clear that the industry needs the Government's support, as does the country if it is to enjoy access to fish as a staple part of its diet.

When fish processors and catchers talk to me about decommissioning and financial support, they point out that they now operate in a wholly regulated market. There is no free market except for the price of the product and for the financial assistance which is denied to them. There is licensing of boats, there are quotas and now they face the imposition of severe food and hygiene regulations. The fishermen, fish catchers and processors are given no compensation for that totally regulated market. That cannot go on for ever.

That position is not determined by the availability of fish in the North sea. We are talking about international obligations, not just our national interests. That needs to be addressed before the Minister or the Secretary of State must cope with a real crisis in our fishing industry, when consumers are complaining, not about the price of fish, but about the fact that it is not available.

10.15 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on an excellent speech. He is well liked in my constituency among the growing number of fishermen who form part of the developing fishing community. They follow his words with great care. Although I cannot always give the answers, they ask me what the Labour Government will do for fisheries. I feel sure that my hon. Friend will be the Minister.

I wish to deal with the Commission's proposals for total allowable catches in block VIIa, which mainly services constituency ports on the coast of Cumbria. I am thinking of Maryport, Workington and Whitehaven, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). Those fishing ports face a TAC reduction for cod of 60 per cent., for whiting of 55 per cent., for plaice of 35 per cent. and for sole of 13 per cent.

The position is aggravated for cod by the Hague preference, whereby regionally dependent communities are given an advantage for reasons which I cannot understand. I should like the Minister to justify that system. I cannot see how Ireland can possibly lay claim to such a concession when conditions there are no worse and no better than those in my constituency. I do not see why Ireland should have the benefit of the preference at a cost to fishermen who work in my ports.

Mr. Salmond: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern for his ports, but we should remember that it was through the intervention work of Garret FitzGerald that we have the Hague preference. It is an excellent principle in the common fisheries policy which emphasises communities which are particularly dependent on fishing. That is a good principle in a fisheries policy, and it was an Irish Foreign Minister who was instumental in achieving it in 1976.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That was 14 years ago, and communities which were wholly dependent on fishing are perhaps as different today as are constituencies which depended on the steel industry, as the hon. Gentleman will know is the case in Scotland.

The ports of west Cumberland probably employ about 200 people in the industry and several dozen people in the processing industry. The general view is that, if the TACs are applied, they may wipe out part of the west Cumberland fishing industry. That would be resented, particularly as, over the years, my constituent fishermen

have repeatedly made protests to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about conservation policies.

In the past few years, I have sent a number of letters to the Ministry that have identified the need for conservation schemes as proposed by fishermen in my constituency. Requests were also made for a decommissioning scheme to be introduced.

Fishermen in my constituency have volutarily changed from using 70 mm nets to 80 mm nets. However, the TAC quotas are based upon scientific assessments which include a calculation based upon 70 mm nets. Therefore, my fishermen strongly believe that the TACs have been set on the basis of inaccurate information. They believe that the matter should be reviewed in the light of equipment used in my area and in other parts of the United Kingdom. My fishermen would not oppose an increase in the mesh size, but obviously they would oppose a 120 mm net. They have, however, voluntarily changed the size of their nets, and they object to the way in which the Commission has produced its figures.

I have made repeated representations to various Ministers about a decommissioning scheme. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee and I was present at those hearings when it dealt with the scheme which has been attacked tonight but which Ministers believe to be the basis upon which they can reject further schemes. The PAC report did not preclude, or include, any reference to the fact that decommissioning schemes were useless and could not be introduced. The Committee accepted that decommissioning schemes could work if that was the will of Government. Then, however, the will of Government was not to make that scheme work, and now they are unwilling to try again.

I believe that a decommissioning scheme could work. To put it bluntly, if we were to scrap boats that were more than 15 years old, it would wipe out a proportion of the British fishing fleet. Why do Ministers not deal with it on that basis? Why do they not consider the criteria that they have submitted tonight? If the reason for Government reticence is money, they should return to the PAC to examine some of the reports that we have produced on waste of public moneys.

The other day, the PAC identified a loss of about £100 million in the bus privatisation. Next Monday, we shall consider a loss of £6 billion due to miscalculation of SERPS. Over the years, the PAC has produced many reports about loss of public money as a result of policies being improperly implemented by civil servants or because the proper policy was not pursued. The money is there; it is just a question of how to allocate it properly.

A decommissioning scheme may be a harsh instrument, but the Government should pursue it. They should not impose damaging cuts on incomes in constituencies such as my own, particularly in the light of what happened earlier this year. My constituents received no additional money from the Government despite inclement weather, and many faced bankruptcy as a result. When the fuel price increases hit boat owners, they were left in a difficult position.

The Government should go for a decommissioning scheme, and they should do so with sufficient will and energy. They should not stand aside to leave it to the market, as is suggested in the proposals before us.

10.23 pm

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) that the arrangements now in force on the Clyde between fishing boats and submarines should be extended to all fishing areas. I know that the Minister suggested that it might be valuable to have a trial period, but I believe that that trial period could be usefully extended to all fishing areas. It is an urgent matter that should be considered by the Government.

The 10-day lay-up recommendation has been criticised as being potentially dangerous because it would encourage or compel fishermen to fish on days when, because of the weather, it would be inappropriate. The lay-up idea is not new. The 92-day option was the most popular with fishermen, no doubt because it would be easy to evade. That raises a second problem with the 10-day rule, for not only would it be dangerous but it would be almost impossible to enforce.

If all fishing boats were required to be tied up for 10 days a month, the scheme would become untenable. How could the entire fishing fleet be tied up for 10 days when different weather conditions prevail along different coastlines? Some would be happy to tie up while others would be unhappy because they would be missing 10 good fishing days. In other words, it would be unfair to impose such a uniform 10-day rule on the fishing industry.

Alternatively, if fishing boats were allowed to choose their own 10 days in the month, the scheme could not be policed. It would be easy for people to write in their logs the 10 days in question, and then not necessarily keep to them. Either way, the 10-day rule would be difficult to enforce and police.

When we express doubts about the 10-day rule, the silence of the Government is indicative of their possible acceptance of the rule. That is odd, given that the west coast fishing industry has been proposing to the Government for some months a weekend ban on fishing activity. The Government have not responded in any way to that suggestion, even though they appear to be playing about with the notion of a 10-day ban. I press them urgently to consider the suggestion of the west coast fishing industry for a weekend ban on fishing activity. Unlike a 10-day ban, it would be easy to enforce. It would be easy to identify any boat that was out at the weekend. It would be better for processors because, instead of being idle for a huge chunk of the month, they would be able easily to respond to a consistent weekend hiatus in the supply of fish. They would be able to adjust to that more easily than to a 10-day ban.

If the Government adopted the west coast suggestion for a weekend ban, they would have an additional card to play in the negotiations. They could say, "We have already begun to incorporate certain ideas," and thereby be better able to resist pressure from other Ministers, especially in regard to the laying up of boats.

The Minister still uses the word "efficiency" in terms of fishing boats, and talks of the need to keep the most efficient fishing boats in the industry. I pointed out in the previous fisheries debate that efficiency is not a positive word when applied to fishing. In every other industry efficiency means lower prices at the end of the day for the consumer. In the fishing industry, uniquely, efficiency means higher prices for the consumer. Large boats

[Mr. Calum MacDonald]

vacuuming up fish from the sea mean in the long run fewer fish and hence higher prices for the consumer. That is exactly what is happening now.

Rather than scrutinising efficiency in this rather unthinking way, Ministers should look at the effects of policies that they might want to introduce on fishing communities, especially on the west coast of Scotland. That area more than any other has scarce resources, and it would be criminal to embark on a policy that would throw away one of the few natural advantages enjoyed by communities in that area and hand it over to fishermen from other areas.

10.31 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I begin with a few words about the loss of the Premier and its crew. Fishermen face all sorts of hazards, physical and man made. We need to hold a debate soon on the safety of fishing vessels. I have long argued that United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels should carry immersion suits, and enough of them for all crew members, as they are required to do in France.

My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) was right to emphasise the fragility of some of the fishing communities on the west coast of Scotland, particularly in his constituency. Some of them face a real threat from the advanced vessels from the north-east of Scotland. The technology that we possess for catching fish far outstrips the viability of the stocks. Somehow we must match the technology to the stocks of fish.

I asked earlier about the Greenland fishery quota. I now declare an interest: my brother Leslie is at this moment fishing for cod off the west coast of Greenland, along with 31 comrades on his stern freezer trawler. That is why I was able to tell the Minister with confidence that one of the reasons why the quota was not taken up was that the weather on both Greenland coasts has been dismal and there has been a lot of ice in the area.

Fishing off the east coast of Greenland—I have been there only once: never again—is much more dangerous than fishing off the west coast. Ministers may have thought that I was being facetious when I argued that only experienced fishermen should fish in those highly dangerous waters. I was not, although I accepted the Minister's point: how otherwise could fishermen gain experience of those inhospitable waters? Skippers and mates who seek to fish them should first travel as passengers with highly experienced crews. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that we never want to see again the loss of one of our big stern trawlers, such as occurred in 1972 with the loss of the Gaul. In that disaster, 32 men were lost. My brother was a member of the crew, but fortunately, his holiday coincided with that ill-fated voyage.

As we have seen in the past 24 hours, fishing anywhere in the north Atlantic is dangerous. The further north the fishermen go, the more dangerous it becomes, especially in the presence of ice. I do not know why the Secretary of State for Scotland is laughing, because this is a serious matter. I am sorry that he does not appreciate that.

I welcome the continuation of fishing in Greenland waters by our small fleet of distant-water trawlers. I also welcome what might be a slight increase in the United Kingdom's share of cod in the Norwegian exclusive zone. That will benefit our fishermen. What is the view of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about what they may see as the small quotas for Norwegian and Faroese waters that are to be given to the former German Democratic Republic?

I do not want to see fishermen there put ashore for ever, but the new Germany, which is part of the European Community, has a huge national fleet. Many of the aging vessels from east German ports should be tied up. I should not want to cross the Clyde in one of them, let alone fish from them in the north Atlantic. Is the door now open for the renewed Germany to be given bigger quotas in some areas? That important question must be addressed.

I am being fair-minded, and I am pleased to see that the Clyde Fishermen's Association will be able to catch another 300 tonnes of Clyde herring. That is a good measure. I share the concern expressed by some hon. Members about the ban on fishing for 10 consecutive days. I said that in an intervention and perhaps the Secretary of State for Scotland will confirm that the 10 consecutive days will include Saturdays and Sundays and that, in effect, we are talking about the loss of six days' fishing.

Mr. Curry *indicated assent.*

Dr. Godman: The Minister nods, thereby clearing up one ambiguity.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) spoke about what I call the Spanish problem. Members of the Select Committee on European Legislation will know that the president of the European Court of Justice delivered an interim judgment on, I think, section 14 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. If that judgment is carried out in a substantive sense by the European Court of Justice, it will have profound implications not only for our constitution and for this place—whatever power this place has—but for our fishermen, particularly in the south-west of England. That is worrying. That decision may be 18 months away, but it is deeply disturbing.

I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Harley), who I think has responsibility for fishing, agriculture and many other things, because I want to say a word about the Northern Ireland fleet. I think that he has been present throughout. I welcome him to his new ministerial post. He and I were on a parliamentary delegation recently and I thoroughly enjoyed his company. But we may part company on fishing matters.

The Northern Ireland fleet, which is important to the Province because of the employment multiplier ratio, and so on, is an aging fleet. I think that I am right in saying that more than 50 per cent. of the fleet is aged 20 years or more. That is getting on, for fishing boats. It is essential that the Minister should argue his corner with his ministerial colleagues as well as in Brussels. When talking about grants and the regeneration of our fleet in the Western Isles, Cornwall and elsewhere, we must not lose sight of the needs of the fishermen of Ulster.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The fleet may be aging, but it was bought second-hand and it has been growing in the past few years.

Dr. Godman: I readily acknowledge that, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman in turn will readily acknowledge that replacing it is a major problem there, just as it is in the Western Isles and elsewhere.

With regard to the multi-annual guidance programme, can the Secretary of State for Scotland estimate what will be the percentage reduction in the United Kingdom's fishing fleet if we meet our obligations under that programme? Will it be about 25 per cent. between now and the end of 1991, or will it be even more than that? I see that the Secretary of State is getting advice, which I am sure will be good advice. Will the Secretary of State look at that formula and tell us roughly how many fishing vessels would be involved? Is it between 300 and 600 vessels? The Secretary of State shakes his head, but I should like to see his answer in the *Official Report*.

[Dr. Godman]

In a nutshell, and oversimplifying like mad, too many fishermen are chasing too few fish. The United Kingdom-registered fishing fleet is far too big in terms of the stocks that that fleet harbours, hence the multi-annual guidance programme obligations. Its size must be reduced, and it is a question of how that is to be done. I have argued for some years that it should be achieved by what was called by a distinguished civil servant in the fisheries section of the Scottish Office—Mr. Boyd-Gordon, who retired a couple of years ago—a maritime set-aside. In other words, a decommissioning scheme. It should be possible to introduce one similar to that of the Danes, which reduced their fleet by a sizeable number.

Other hon. Members mentioned the experience of the previous decommissioning scheme, and there is no doubt that the Hull trawler owners took that scheme, the Government and the present Minister to the cleaners. For example, the owner of the trawler Pict received in the 1960s a grant in the region of £1 million from the White Fish Authority to build that vessel. Just before the disastrous decommissioning scheme was introduced, that owner was negotiating the sale of the Pict. Under the scheme, he received a sum in excess of £500,000, and then sold the vessel for about £600,000.

The Public Accounts Committee rightly censured the creators and administrators of that scheme. I know fishermen who worked for the owner of that vessel and for others for years, but who received under £500 in redundancy money—which was less than the decommissioning payment of around £415 per gross registered tonne. That is why the right hon. Gentleman and his officials are unwilling to introduce another scheme.

We should be able to devise a fair scheme. If the Government produced one, we would scrutinise it in a rigorous and critical way—although the Minister does not like criticism, as he showed tonight. The right hon. Gentleman started off being extremely polite, but ended by shouting and bawling at the temporary members of the Scottish National party. There was no need for that. We seek only to protect the interests of our fishermen.

With the support of right hon. and hon. Members, it ought to be possible to devise a scheme that would enable middle-aged fishermen to tie up once and for all their middle-aged vessels, without facing destitution. That should be our aim, and we should unite in that endeavour. There are too many vessels and too few fish to be caught by them, and the size of our fleet must be reduced.

A major decommissioning scheme could be devised that would allow for a reduction in the size of our fleet while at the same time allowing its aging sectors to be renewed—to allow young men to enter the catching sector with the conviction that they could earn a decent living in that most hazardous of occupations.

The Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland are wrong when they argue that there can be no decommissioning scheme. The alternative, if we are to protect our fishing stocks and to maintain their viability, is that fishermen will have to tie up and be reduced to a state of penury. I would willingly support Ministers if they came forward with a decent and reasonable decommissioning scheme for our fishermen.

10.49 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): First, let me associate myself with the condolences that have been extended, through the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), to her constituents who are in mourning tonight.

This has been a good and a knowledgeable debate. It has been made clear—particularly in the excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley)—that Labour's approach is not to recriminate in advance of the outcome, but to advance practical objections to the proposals in the hope of contributing constructively to the hand that the Ministers will play next week. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food asked us to help him in his battle, and we want to do that because, whatever the longer-term prospects, the livelihoods of many fishermen throughout Britain—and the wider communities which must rely on the industry—depend on the outcome.

I believe—as, I think, do many other hon. Members who have spoken, and who come from diverse parts of the United Kingdom—that it is fundamentally inaccurate to talk about the Scottish, the English or the Northern Irish fishing industry. Those generic terms cover a series of small industries with very different and sometimes conflicting interests. As we advance into the age of quotas, restrictions and regulations, my thinking becomes conditioned by the danger that, if all the regulations favour the strong against the weak, we shall end up not with healthy communities and the "living harbours" described by the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks), but with, perhaps, a more efficient fleet without a socially balanced fishing community.

That applies to Scotland, England and, indeed, Europe as a whole. I have mentioned the conflict between the interests of, for instance, the east and the west; we should also recognise the problems of the south-west, where Spanish fishing boats are seen as a threat. We do not deny the existence of conservation problems, or scorn scientific evidence because we do not like its conclusions; that would be a foolish attitude for any party to adopt. Only short-term thinkers chase votes in the fishing communities by suggesting that there are painless solutions to the current problems.

As has been clear from every speech that we have heard tonight, two issues must be the subject of considerable effort and resistance in the Council next week; the question of white fish minimum net sizes, and the proposed requirement for vessels to abstain from fishing for 10 consecutive days per month in 1991. I have spoken to several people on the west coast tonight; the area has a first-class conservation record, and poses absolutely no threat to global stocks. One of those peple told me that, if the compromise of 100 mm mesh were accepted, it would be a disaster for his local fishing industry. He is not trying to dodge conservation responsibilities; he knows the problems that would be created.

Fishermen's organisations throughout Britain are committed to the 90 mm diamond-shaped mesh size, with the incorporation into the net of a panel of 80 mm square mesh above the cod end. That would reduce the number of discards, and would be a sensible step forward. The Minister should also bear in mind the fact that the change in gear would not only bring conservation benefits, but could be implemented cheaply by fishermen in the areas that I have mentioned. One of the problems of opting for

a more dramatic change in mesh size is that many fishermen would have to entirely change their gear at a substantial cost.

A specific point was made to me and perhaps the Minister will deal with it tonight or write to me. It was suggested that, under the common agricultural policy, French fishermen have a right to have by-catch restrictions waived if they use selective trawls and that that is an incentive to adapt to conservation-minded gear. That seems a sensible proposition and I should be grateful if the Minister could advise me whether it would be open to British fishermen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe was right to say that cuts in catching effort that are based on quotas and restrictions will almost certainly lead to abuse and will appear unnatural to fishermen. By far the best way to approach the matter is with the emphasis on improvement and sophistication in gear and a more conservation-minded approach.

On the 10-day ban, the arguments are those of common sense and practicality. If fishermen know that there is a lay-off coming up, they have an incentive to fish harder in the preceding weeks. There is a long history of conservation measures that provide an answer on paper but prove to be worse than useless in practice. This is one such proposal, and it should not be agreed to. It would increase the relative disadvantage to areas that have smaller boats and a much less capital-intensive fishing infrastructure.

As I understand it—I am not trying to be smart, and I would be happy for the Minister to write to me about it—the proposal is that a vessel that has achieved 40 per cent. of its total catch by the end of June would come within the framework of the 10-day ban. It seems extraordinary that it does not matter whether it is 40 per cent. of 200 boxes or 40 per cent. of 2,000 boxes. Nobody can make a comparison in terms of the effect on stocks between those two vessels, but the vessel that has caught, on these figures, 80 boxes will be subjected to the same ban as the vessel that has caught 800 boxes. That cannot be right. It disproportionately disadvantages the smaller, more conservation-minded vessels and the weaker fishing communities.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) pointed out, fishermen on the west coast have repeatedly called for a weekend ban. They saw this coming and put forward a more sensible approach. The Government should back them and strongly resist what is seen as a foolish proposal.

The misreporting or non-reporting of catches is a problem in many parts of the country. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) referred to it as cheating. It is cheating not against the Government or some abstract body but against other fishermen and fishing communities. If vessels go from east to west or north to south or vice versa and claim that fish came from there when they did not, they are taking away the right of fishermen in those areas to catch the fish in that year and are distorting the quotas that those fishermen will be eligible to catch in subsequent years.

I was told a story tonight—I will not go into detail—about a find at a west coast port last week. Under the surface of what was apparently a catch of coley there were 60 boxes of cod. The point made to me was that, if that is going on frequently and many boats are not reporting their catches, what in heaven's name has that done to the scientific projections on the west coast which have led, in the coming year, to a cut in the quota for west coast fishermen?

I said earlier that I wished that representatives of every political party would condemn that practice. The elegant way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) did so, without recrimination or sectional divide, was a model. I am sorry that it was not followed; I am particularly sorry that it was not followed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

The quota for monkfish and megrim is of particular concern on the west coast. It is believed that the precautionary TACs could be increased substantially, which would be a major compensation for fishermen who are losing out in other ways.

I conclude—these things must be rushed through at this hour—on the issue of decommissioning. The Minister says that it is not the way to reduce pressure on fish stocks. I understand his concern. We know that the previous decommissioning scheme was a fiasco and that it was mismanaged—that has been admitted—and we further know that the pressure stock licensing scheme was a fiasco. I remember that from long before I was a Member, when I wrote about it extensively. Everybody knew that it would be a fiasco. It was wide open to abuse, and it was clear that licences would move from parts of the country that were weak to parts that were already strong. Until that was stopped relatively recently, it is precisely what happened.

Tonight, as in previous fishery debates, not one Conservative Member has defended the Government's refusal to have any sort of decommissioning scheme. A decommissioning scheme is in progress. It is based on hardship and disillusionment among fishermen and is taking out the wrong people and vessels. It is not touching the excessive catching power of some areas of the country. It is the wrong kind of decommissioning scheme and it is hurtful to many fishing communities.

I do not underestimate the difficulties that the Government face in implementing a decommissioning scheme. I sympathise with much of what the Minister said about those difficulties, but it is not adequate to say that there are difficulties and that there have been failures in the past in order to deny the possibility of doing it better in the future.

As the Minister goes to Europe, we do not wish to divide the House. This matter is for the British Government alone, but within Europe they alone are holding out against it.

I have been asked by hon. Members who have not spoken to seek an assurance from the Minister about transponders being fitted to gear, bearing in mind everything that has happened in the past two weeks, and about who is to pay for that. We would welcome an early assurance that the cost of transponders, or pingers, will be met by the Ministry of Defence.

Yes, we wish the Minister well as he goes to Europe. We understand the complexity of the issues in which he is involved. We have defined the issues on which we believe he must fight extremely hard, and we know that many fishermen and fishing communities will be waiting eagerly and anxiously for the outcome of the discussions.

11.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): Like many other right hon. and hon. Members, I begin by adding, through the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), my expression of most sincere condolences to the bereaved families and friends of the crew of the fishing vessel Premier, which so tragically foundered recently. Anyone who has had contact with a small fishing community knows the intensity of grief that is experienced in such tragedies. When the bodies cannot be recovered, as so often is the case, the grief is extended and prolonged. I shall pass the hon. Lady's comments to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, and I can tell her that the marine accident investigation branch of the Department of Transport will conduct an inquiry into the loss. It will consider what steps are necessary to allow it to carry out its investigation properly. I shall bring her suggestions to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I think that it would be appropriate if, on behalf of my constituents, I thanked all right hon. and hon. Members who have so rightly expressed their sympathy to them. Sometimes it may seem that words are easy to say, but I know the sincerity with which they were expressed. I shall relay those comments to my constituents over the weekend when I visit the families.

As the marine investigation group is in contact with Duthies of Lossiemouth, which is releasing as much information as it can about the Premier, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that details about any plans to raise the vessel are immediately given to that office or to me, because the relatives are deeply concerned? I know that the Secretary of State, a similar incident having occurred in his constituency, appreciates the sensitivities of this matter.

Mr. Lang: I certainly acknowledge that lack of information adds to the pain of the situation. I am sure that the hon. Lady's comments will be noted by those who read the debate. On the same broad subject, I assure the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ministry of Defence will take note of their points about the experiment in the Clyde involving submarines and fishing vessels.

This wide-ranging debate has embraced fishing interests throughout the United Kingdom. Many right hon. and hon. Members have contributed. Unfortunately, some have not been able to remain for the end of the debate, and I understand the reasons for that. One or two hon. Members have failed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), who has shown sustained support for fishing interests in East Anglia for a long time.

The national interest in fishing is reflected in the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food opened the debate; I, with my Scottish responsibilities, have the opportunity to wind it up; the Minister with responsibilities for agriculture and fisheries in Northern Ireland—my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley)—has been present throughout the debate and has listened carefully to it; and my hon. Friend who takes a special interest in fisheries matters at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), has been present throughout the debate and contributed to it.

It has been a United Kingdom debate, reflecting the crucial importance of the fishing industry to many parts of the United Kingdom. The concern that exists on most sides of the House, although it is not so apparent on all, is that we should achieve long-term prosperity in that industry. Those who last year forecast desolation in the industry in 1990 have been proved wrong, as prices have increased to offset the reduction in fish landings. It is essential not to view these matters in the short term; we have to look to the future sustenance of the industry, to its long-term viability, and avoid the easy, short-term palliatives which are sometimes offered.

A number of themes came through in the debate. There was particular interest in technical conservation matters. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) suggested that there was no support for fishermen. If one reflects on the size of the fishing industry and sets against that the colossal Government effort in enforcement, research and administration, one cannot but admit that the Government rightly give enormous attention to the problems of the fishing industry. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the improvements in technical conservation and the reduction in discards which is sought by the various measures under consideration.

I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who is not present now, that our scientists are negative about the square mesh. Because our scientists had already done work on cod ends and extension pieces, made entirely of square mesh, the industry was aware of the problems of nets made entirely of square mesh. Thoughts turned to panels, which have been experimented with throughout the year.

I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that there has been a delay. Within six weeks of receiving the Commission's proposals for using 120 mm square mesh net, scientists in the Department had already started the important trials which showed how unrealistic the Commission's proposals were. The House will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon describe the proposal for 120 mm as "dead in the water".

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) suggested that 90 mm with 80 mm square mesh panels would be the answer. It is true that that net combination would assist the discard of whiting and haddock, but it would do nothing for cod, and we have to deal with a mixed fishery. We need a measure that gives a balance between the species caught.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lang: No, because I sense that the House is anxious to move to a conclusion.

Mr. Salmond: On that point——

Mr. Lang: No, I want to cover other points on the issue in responding to other hon. Members.

The important point to emphasise is that technical conservation measures have an important contribution to make in helping to solve the problems. For over a year, we have been pressing for European Community measures to make fishing gear more selective. Square mesh panels and netting can give useful conservation benefits. The debate at

the Fisheries Council next week will be about how far we should go in improving selectivity to protect small fish. It is vital that the Community reaches a compromise solution because if the talks fail, everybody loses.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) raised the question of the cuts in plaice and sole in area VII. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are very much aware of the importance of plaice and sole stocks in that area. We will work to increase the TACs proposed where it is within the possibilities of science. We will also try to secure as many advantageous quota swaps as possible.

My hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives and for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) raised the question of quota hoppers, which one can understand because they represent constituencies in the south-west. I know that the matter worries them and that they are in touch with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives recently had a meeting with my right hon. Friend, and I know that he will be aware of the great concern and close attention that is being given to the issue in the Ministry.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) raised the question of North sea saithe from Norway. It is true that the saithe TAC has increased by 4 per cent. and that Norway has retained more than its industry requires. However, the EC would need to find an additional 11,550 tonnes of cod equivalent and probably 14,500 tonnes of herring to buy it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked about the EC-Norway agreement on fish stocks forming a central role in the determination of North sea TACs and quotas. The key element in the agreement is the treatment of the western mackerel stock. The migratory pattern of the stock has changed in recent years and has resulted in a greater proportion of the fish being found in Norwegian waters. That is the underlying reason why the TACs are being negotiated in that way.

The central issue in effort limitation was the 10-day rule. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested that, under the Commission's proposals on limitation, boats would be required to fish for 10 consecutive days. He said that boats might, therefore, fish in unacceptable weather. The hon. Member did not get it quite right. The Commission's proposal is that boats fishing predominantly for cod and haddock should desist from fishing for 10 consecutive days of the month. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and others got that right.

That seems another sensible measure which is worth considering in the context of the need to conserve stocks. We accept the need to limit fishing effort to protect fish stocks. The proposal provides a starting point for discussion and refinement at the Fisheries Council. It is right that it should be further considered.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No. I am about to go on to decommissioning.

It is well known that many hon. Members oppose the Government's view on decommissioning. However, they have not answered the point put by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He said that we have to achieve a method that will work and give value for money. It would be possible for a large sum to be spent on the decommissioning scheme without reducing the catch by a single tonne. Some 30 per cent. of tonnage could come out without reducing the catch. Would a decommissioning scheme give good value for money? Our experience of a decommissioning scheme was extremely unsatisfactory.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Did not my right hon. Friend listen to what I said on the decommissioning scheme? I endeavoured to deal precisely with my right hon. Friend's argument. Did he also not listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw), who is a member of the Public Accounts Committee? The Committee did not attack the concept of decommissioning; it attacked the way in which the decommissioning scheme worked for the Humberside fleet. It suggested that there were other ways in which a decommissioning scheme could be carried out cost-effectively.

Mr. Lang: I quite understand my right hon. Friend's point, which he has made for some time. The point is that the decommissioning scheme as proposed does not take the catching capacity out of the fleet, and it has not been found to be satisfactory on that ground.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) raised the matter of the sea fisheries committees for Scotland. This issue has been looked at in the past when the view was taken that the current management system best reflects the circumstances in Scotland. There has been no pressure from the Scottish industry for such changes. That is one area in which I cannot follow English colleagues.

The fishing industry is immensely important in Scotland, where some two thirds of the landings by value and some three quarters of the landings by volume take place. Eight of the top 10 ports in the United Kingdom by value of landings are in Scotland. All that would be put at risk if we followed the policies of the Scottish National party as set out in the amendment. It calls on the Government to "display some commitment", but the SNP is the party which, if it achieves its attempt to gain independence for Scotland, would destroy the common fisheries policy, which brings those great advantages to Scotland. The SNP talks about a "vital resource industry", but it is the party that would destroy the resources by pandering to the needs of today and neglecting the needs of tomorrow.

Scottish National party Members cannot have it all ways. They cannot have a policy in their own party of membership of the Community, but reject the procedures by which decisions are taken in the Community. They cannot claim that the fishing industry faces problems, which it undoubtedly does, but reject the means for dealing with those problems. They cannot care about the future of the fishing industry and propose irresponsible policies that would destroy it.

The policies of the Scottish National party pose an enormous threat to the Scottish fishing industry. An independent Scotland would have just three votes in the Fisheries Council instead of the 10 votes that it has at present. I urge the House to reject the SNP amendment.

This has been an extremely useful debate ahead of the Fisheries Council. I assure all hon. Members that the constructive points that have been made—for the most

[Mr. Lang]

part—will be considered carefully ahead of the negotiations. The TACs and quotas for 1991 are but the first step in the management of the fisheries next year. We shall continue to pursue our policy of sensible management measures in consultation with the industry, and always with the aim of securing long-term prosperity.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman has spoken once.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division:

Mr. Salmond *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall take it after the Division.

The House having divided: Ayes 22, Noes 76.

Division No. 29] **[11.16 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Doran, Frank
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Haynes, Frank
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Morley, Elliot
Pike, Peter L.
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Wallace, James
Wilson, Brian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forth, Eric
Goodlad, Alastair
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lang, Ian
Lightbown, David
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Sir David
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steve
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 11th December 1990 relating to Total Allowable Catches and Quotas for 1991, the proposals described in its un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 11th December 1990 and its Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum of 12th December 1990 relating to the reciprocal fisheries Agreement between the Community and Norway for 1991, European Community Document No. 9898/90 on guide prices for fishery products for 1991, and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1991 consistent with the requirement for conservation of fishing stocks.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because of the incredible speed of delivery of the Secretary of State for Scotland, I was unable to hear whether he was going to the Fisheries Council meeting, whether he was aware that the Government were meant to agree with the 80 mm sq mesh and whether he called the proposal for 10 consecutive days of no fishing a sensible measure. I do not know whether the House could hear. As he is present, perhaps he will clarify those matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. The hon. Member is attempting to prolong the debate.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th December, unless proceedings in Committee of the whole House on new Clauses in respect of the Criminal Justice Bill relating to capital punishment have previously been disposed of, the Chairman shall at Ten o'clock put forthwith the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause which has been read a second time, the Question on any Amendment to such a new Clause which has been selected by him and which may then be moved and, thereafter, the Question that the Clause, or the Clause as amended, be added to the Bill);

(c) any Question necessary to dispose of any other new Clauses and Amendments thereto, which have been selected by him and which may then be moved.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 19th December, Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall have effect as if the words 'eight o'clock' were substituted for the words 'nine o'clock' in line 15.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

PETITION

Southern Africa

11.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I have a petition to present from Niall Fraser and Steven Dunn, who are students of Montrose academy. It is supported by 570 other students at that academy and citizens of the burgh of Montrose and district.

The petition demonstrates support for Oxfam's work in fostering economic and social development in southern Africa. The petition states that major obstacles to such developments include apartheid in South Africa, conflict in the region, mounting debts owed by African Governments to northern Governments and banks, as well as the insufficiency of appropriate aid and the failure of Governments to help the poorest in the region:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the British Government to encourage international efforts to tackle these obstacles and support the work of OXFAM to end poverty and suffering in front line Africa.

To lie upon the Table.

Medical Research

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

11.30 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I must record how grateful I am to Mr. Speaker for allowing me this opportunity to raise the general topic of Department of Health funding of medical research, and the specific needs of some vital research projects in Leicestershire.

First, however, it is important to comment upon the change in the level of public funding for medical research through the main channel of the Medical Research Council. It is a great credit to the Government that the funds available for medical research have dramatically increased since they came to power in 1979. The Library has provided me with the relevant statistics, from which it is clear that that funding has increased by 47 per cent. In 1981-82, funding increased by a record 28 per cent. and by a further 11 per cent. in 1989-90.

The funding for heart disease research has been similarly significant. In 1985-86, the level of funding stood at £4·6 million, but in 1989-90 it increased to £5·5 million. In addition, in 1989-90, about £2·5 million of such research was directly funded by the Department of Health. Tonight I hope to be able to persuade my hon. Friend to part with just a little more money.

The United Kingdom has one of the worst records for heart disease, so research is essential and crucial. Recently, my constituents began to lobby me to work for more funds for research into heart problems, and drew my attention to work at Groby road hospital, Leicester, into mechanical heart valve noises. An observer might reasonably ask about the significance of such noises, and the short answer is that they can establish whether a valve is faulty. Unfortunately, that is a critical issue today, because, in the early 1980s, a number of faulty valves were fitted.

It has been established that faulty valves have been responsible for at least 250 deaths worldwide. In Britain, 5,000 patients were fitted with those devices. They were withdrawn, however, in the mid-1980s, and although the failure risk of those valves—it is important to stress this—is one in 13,000 as against one in 25,000 for all heart valves, it is enough to cause concern. I have a letter from a constituent who possesses two of those faulty valves. I have received other letters and representations from constituents and others in Leicestershire.

Apart from the problem of strut failure in the valves, there is the second, related, problem of the clotting of the valve. Research currently under way at Groby road hospital in Leicester, it is suggested, can establish whether a valve is faulty. That research is concerned with a new way of using valve sounds to detect defects, and it was to appeal for funds to allow that research to continue that I originally requested this debate. The issue has been of sufficient concern for the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) to form a national heart valves action group with the intention of banning hear valves that are not approved by the Government.

The technique for assessing a faulty valve can be explained simply. If one hits an empty cup with a spoon, a characteristic noise is heard. If a blob of Blue-tak or some other substance is affixed to the cup and the cup is then struck like a bell, the noise will be noticeably different. A similar effect occurs when clots form on mechanical

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

prosthetic heart valves, and that provides the only means available for the detection of clots. The technique is studying emissions that occur outside the audio spectrum and cannot be heard using a stethoscope.

If a clot is detected early, it can be dissolved. If not, it will eventually interfere with the valve operation, and emergency surgery will be necessary, with a consequent high mortality and high cost. There must be a trade-off here in that, if the art can be perfected, the costs of long-term and expensive surgery must be reduced.

I said that my intention was to ask for additional support for one Leicestershire research project. But having spent time researching for this debate, I feel that I must draw the attention of the House to others in Leicestershire. Hon. Members in all parts of the House are aware that the demand for medical resources far outstrips our ability to provide them. Despite the record increase in funding during our tenure of office, there must be additional ways of raising money. In that connection, I draw attention to Medisearch, which has been established in Leicestershire as a registered charity and which supports medical research at the university of Leicester medical school and teaching hospitals in the county, the royal infirmary, Leicester general hospital and Groby road and Glenfield hospitals.

In the past, Medisearch has helped research into cot deaths, high blood pressure, strokes and heart disease, high risk pregnancies, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, eye problems of the elderly, kidney transplants and diseases in newborn children. Funds are now urgently needed for research into breast cancer, heart disease, childhood asthma, failing eyesight in the elderly, cystic fibrosis, infertility and brain damage in infants.

Medisearch's task is to help bridge the gap between the public funding and educational funding of medical research. It is more applied than pure research. In other words, it must be of relevance both to the teaching and application sides in the county hospitals. Priorities at present are for breast cancer research, and of course the cross-fertilisation of research ideas from one project to another is considered important in preventing unnecessary duplication and overlap.

Medisearch was established many years ago in Leicester to develop the desires of Leicestershire people and local industry to provide such support. Recently, to expand its work to meet the increasing requirements and rewards of research, the trustees have appointed a full-time fund-raising director. He has made tremendous strides in seeking out money with a range of activities which hon. Members would be pleased to claim as part of their fund-raising activities, and I pay tribute to him.

Apart from the research at Groby road to which I have referred, there are other examples of research projects in the county which currently need funding and which illustrates the effective use of applied medical research in Leicestershire. There is, for instance, the extra-corporeal membrane oxygeneration project—ECMO. The equipment permits the treatment of cardiorespiratory failure when other measures have failed or are not appropriate, such as the breathing of meconium at birth. If a baby is put on an ordinary ventilator, it will usually die. ECMO will keep a baby alive until the lungs recover, and there have been several striking successes, but the treatment costs £5,000 a case.

Then there is the detection of respiratory problems in infants, especially those less than a year old. Research is needed for viral infections and for babies at risk of cot death. A respiratory function laboratory is being developed in Leicester royal infirmary, but £250,000-worth of equipment is needed to monitor breathing, heart rate and oxygenation.

Thirdly, there is asthma. Asthma is more prevalent in pre-school children, we know, but we need to research its origins and the environmental factors that contribute to this frightening condition. Monitoring equipment is needed for hospitals and for children who are followed up at home.

Fourthly, I must mention islet cells from the pancreas. Work on transplanting pancreatic islet cells is advanced in Leicestershire, which is used to treating diabetics. If it works, the new treatment would remove the need for lifetime insulin injections. The condition affects about one in 600 British children. After experimental work, trials are now needed on humans to determine appropriate locations for transplant and the methodology of injections.

Fifthly, I refer to implantable defibrillators. It is now possible to implant computerised pacemakers that detect irregular ventricles or heartbeats and restore normal heart rhythm, but the treatment costs more than £10,000 per case, and we need trials to find out how effective they are.

I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to discuss Department of Health funding for medical research. I have brought to the Minister's attention the worries of heart valve patients in my constituency. People concerned about their own condition are visiting the House tonight. I have highlighted some of the important research in Leicestershire and I have drawn to my hon. Friend's attention Medisearch, which bridges the public and private sectors; and I have referred to five other examples of excellent research in Leicestershire. I commend them to my hon. Friend and hope that he will look on them favourably.

11.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on raising a subject of considerable importance to anyone interested in the future of health care in Britain. The national health service's provision of health care is and will always remain critically dependent on research—to develop new treatments, to discover new drugs and to furnish a better understanding of how the body works, thereby enabling doctors to treat conditions and diseases that previous generations regarded as disabling and beyond the power of physicians.

One of the most exciting aspects of medical science is the fact that clinicians will never be content to admit defeat in the face of conditions or diseases. They always want —rightly—to find new ways of treating them and of helping the patients. Medical research, funded by the Department of Health, or by the Department of Education and Science, or by the private sector, has a vital role to

play in improving health care for patients of the NHS and ensuring that the frontiers of medical science are for ever being extended.

Any analysis, however, superficial, of the history of medical science in Britain could not fail to be impressed by the pace and extent of advance—over quite a short period—in the quality of care in our hospitals. That is the result of the investment of time and money in medical research.

The subject chosen by my hon. Friend is of considerable importance to everyone interested in the future of health care in Britain. The scale of research and the progress made in expanding the commitment to research in recent years are remarkable. The figures for research in England made the case for me. My hon. Friend reasonably sought to concentrate on Department of Health research funding, but it would be wrong to look at that in isolation and not examine the total research effort that is devoted to advancing medical science and improving the quality of health care available to patients.

By far the biggest investment in health research is not in the public sector but in the private sector. It is estimated that our pharmaceutical industry invests £793 million a year in medical research. I stress that such research is important to the national health service, and it is considerably to the credit of the pharmaceutical industry that its research effort, although essential to the industry's survival, makes a major contribution to the national effort to find new ways to treat disease and improve the condition off patients.

My constituency is close to that of my hon. Friend, and he will know that it is the location of two major drug companies, both of which are greatly committed to research. One of them employs many of my constituents in medical research. Perhaps some of my hon. Friend's constituents also work in Fisons. It would be quite wrong to overlook that part of our total medical research effort.

In the independent sector, substantial research is funded by voluntary contributions to research charities. Medisearch is one such charity, about which my hon. Friend spoke. In addition, there is funding through the university councils, as part of the core activity of our universities. There is funding through the Medical Research Council, which is part of the research council effort, and both of those are in the budget of the Department of Education and Science. The Department of Health has a national research budget, and local research is organised within the national health service. Other agencies are also funded by the Department of Health.

In 1989-90, the latest year for which I have complete figures, the total expenditure on health research in England, quite apart from the other countries of the United Kingdom, was almost £1·4 billion. The expenditure on medical research is the equivalent of almost 1p on income tax. That is a substantial investment and commitment to medical research in the public and private sectors.

I have sought to stress the importance of setting the Medical Research Council in context, but it is often picked out as the bellwether of the Government's contribution and commitment. Since 1979, the resources available to the council have risen by more than 26 per cent. in real terms. No one can doubt the commitment to and the scale of medical research in Britain.

The importance of medical research was stressed in a report published in 1988 by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology entitled "Priorities in Medical Research". That report suggested that we should establish a national health research authority in order to try to ensure that some of the officially directed research programmes would have greater unity of purpose and priority.

In response to that report, the Government published a White Paper in December 1989 also entitled "Priorities in Medical Research" in which we announced that we did not intend to proceed with the proposal for a national health research authority, but that we intended instead to appoint a chief of research and development as a member of the national health service management executive who would be responsible for, among other things, ensuring that the opportunities that existed for national health service management to act as a catalyst for research were taken in order to introduce a properly prioritised approach to health research. Professor Michael Peckham will be taking up those duties in January 1991.

Not only are we committing the resources, but we are looking all the time to ensure that we get value for money for public sector resources and that we take every opportunity to ensure that our commitment to medical research is carried through in a real and effective way.

My hon. Friend was anxious to look not only at the national scene—it is important to be clear about the national perspective on medical research—but at what was going on in Leicestershire, a county which both he and I have the honour to represent. He mentioned a number of schemes, and I want to comment on some of them.

First, my hon. Friend mentioned the research going on in Leicestershire into ways to monitor and improve mechanical heart valves. I hope that the final report of the research carried out at Groby road hospital will provide information on what further possible studies might be justified. If the acoustic assessment technique to which my hon. Friend referred proved capable of detecting early clot formation on mechanical heart valves, I understand that equipment already on the market could be modified by the manufacturer to provide a machine for that purpose for the NHS.

It has been suggested that the acoustic assessment technique might also be capable of early diagnosis of the mechanical failure of those heart valves. If proposals by an established research organisation were made to the Department to pursue that line of research, they would receive consideration alongside all the other claims and proposals in the competition for research resources within the Department.

The Department treats seriously the safety of artificial heart valves. We are kept fully informed of matters relating to failure and we are in close touch with manufacturers and relevant regulatory authorities abroad. Since 1985, when the Shiley valve was withdrawn from the United Kingdom market, I am pleased to say that there have been no reports of mechanical heart valve failure in Britain. None the less, that is an important issue in Leicestershire, and I have constituents who are committed to the continuation of those programmes.

My hon. Friend spoke also about proposals for research in the county on the detection of respiratory problems in infants under one year old and the related subject—to a layman, at least—of asthma. I take a personal interest in both, because my own two-and-a-half-year-old daughter has the misfortune to be a mild asthma sufferer, so I have seen at first hand the problems that that

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

condition can cause. If there is an opportunity to undertake research into ameliorating those related problems, no one will be better pleased than me.

My hon. Friend asked about the possibilities of research into extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation—a technique in which blood is oxygenated outside the body. In effect, it amounts to an artificial lung. Conventionally, that technology is used in open heart surgery, while the lungs and heart are being operated upon, and it is referred to as cardio-pulmonary bypass. A pioneering study was undertaken in the United Kingdom by cardio-thoracic surgeons in Leicester to investigate the treatment of newborn babies with damaged lungs—due, for example, to inhalation of poisonous fluid.

That technique involves the use of specially developed apparatus that minimises the trauma to the blood by the artificial lung, so that it can be used for much longer periods—allowing the damaged lung to heal. If that can be made to work, it will offer an exciting opportunity. It is yet another illustration of the type of research to which I referred at the beginning of my remarks and which, if followed through, can lead to developments in medical technology and treatment that will in future break barriers, and cure conditions that previous generations found impossible to manage.

All the proposals from within the county to which my hon. Friend referred are a tribute to the inventiveness and ideas of Leicestershire people that test the frontiers of medical knowledge. As a Leicestershire Member of Parliament myself, and as someone interested in the promotion of medical research, I am obviously open to all such ideas. However, I must tell my hon. Friend that, as ever, all proposals must expect to participate in the competition for resources that is a necessary element in the priority process in any budgeting context.

Mr. Tredinnick: Nevertheless, will my hon. Friend confirm that he will look carefully at the proposals that come before him, even if they may on occasions be a little controversial?

Mr. Dorrell: Of course I will examine with care the proposals that come before me, and I shall try to disregard the extent to which they are controversial. To the extent that I am asked to make any decisions on the allocation of research resources, it seems important that I should assess them on their merits and not on the nature of the campaigns that are engendered either for or against them.

I may add—it would be absurd were it otherwise—that the allocation of resources to specific research programmes is not something in which a politician is qualified to intervene. In the whole of our research programme—not just in medical research—we operate a system whereby the politicians allocate the resources, but leave the choice between the competing claims of different groups of scientists to people who are more likely to make informed judgments about their relative merits.

As my hon. Friend knows, I am by background a business man, not a scientist. I would not claim to be able to make a properly informed decision about the different competing claims to which my hon. Friend refers. However, I can commit the Government to maintaining a medical research programme that will allow for choices to be made by people better qualified than me, to ensure that opportunities for continuing to push forward the boundaries of medical science continue to be taken.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Friday 14 December 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

MV Derbyshire

9.34 am

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I beg the leave of the House to present a petition on behalf of the MV Derbyshire Families Association to establish a new inquiry in the light of new evidence presented by Professor Geraint Price of Brunel university to the Royal Institution of Naval Architects on 18 October and the new evidence obtained by Tyne Tees Television in the underwater film of the wreckage of the Kowloon Bridge. The petitioners pray:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Transport to establish a new public inquiry into the loss of the MV Derbyshire And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 7053/90 relating to a research programme in the field of human capital and mobility (1990-94), shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee C.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Overseas Development

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

[Relevant document: European Community Document No. 7059/90 on a Research and Development Programme for Life Sciences and Technologies for Developing Countries.]

9.36 am

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I am delighted to introduce this debate on the all important issues of development aid. Development is a complex process, and so is managing an aid programme, but there is a single theme underlying our programme. It is to achieve a continuing and sustainable reduction in the grinding poverty in which so much of the developing world lives.

The solutions are not simple; nor can they be imposed. If we are to achieve our aim, we must work in partnership with not only our fellow donors, but, most of all, the people of the developing countries themselves.

The key development issues for the 1990s are: support for effective Government policies in developing countries, built around open, accountable government and sound economic management; tackling specific needs through well-designed and well-managed projects; and a commitment to environmental sustainability, combined with a realistic approach to population issues.

The agenda for the 1990s is a challenging one, but I believe that Britain is well equipped to respond to it. Last month, we announced plans for gradual continued real growth in the aid programme for developing countries over the next three years. The new plans envisage a 17 per cent. cash increase, equivalent to around 2 per cent. in real terms. Entirely separately from this, we have also announced provisions for assistance to eastern Europe and the USSR, and, for the first time, global environmental assistance. This shows that our help for eastern Europe has not been at the expense of aid for developing countries.

Britain continues to take the lead in proposing further debt relief for the poorest. In September this year my right hon. Friend the then Chancellor of the Exchequer launched new proposals—the Trinidad terms—designed to reduce by two thirds the debt owed by the poorest countries to creditor Governments. These are now under active discussion in the Paris Club.

Successful development is not only about transfer of resources. It is equally about quality and effectiveness. The Overseas Development Administration is well regarded by many donors not only for the high quality of its own staff, but for being able to call on the services of a wide range of British non-Governmental Organisations, academic institutions and the private sector, with whom we continue to work so closely.

The first of our key development challenges—is support for effective government. The attack on poverty requires, first, sustained economic growth and, secondly, a determination to ensure that the developing world's poor share in the benefits of that growth.

Following the poor economic performance of many developing countries in the 1970s, it was increasingly recognised that the old prescriptions had failed to deliver. The task in the 1980s has been to restore the basis for economic growth through policy and institutional reform.

Reform can be painful, but those who blame reform programmes for the present plight of developing countries confuse the disease with the cure. More and more countries have themselves realised the need for reforms. Sixty-two countries had sought and received assistance for economic reform from the World bank by the end of 1989.

As in so much of our work, international co-operation is essential. No single donor can provide all the support required by developing country Governments in designing and implementing their reform programmes. It is right that the international financial institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, should take the lead, but they need to be supported by bilateral donors. The British Government have been in the forefront in providing the intellectual, practical and financial support to adjustment programmes.

The House will be aware that our support is of two types—politically to persuade countries in need of reform to adopt sensible policies and financially to support countries who have undertaken reform programmes. We provided more than £400 million in balance of payments support to sub-Saharan Africa between 1984 and 1989. This year we expect to spend about £130 million in this way.

We have co-operated with the bank and fund on the design of adjustment programmes, for example on civil service reform in Ghana, on assistance to reform the Tanzanian banking system and on private sector policy

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

reform in Uganda. We have also provided essential technical expertise in key posts, such as that of the general manager of the central bank in Gambia.

I have already emphasised the importance of donor co-ordination in support of economic reform. A particularly important multi-donor initiative was launched in 1987 called the special programme of assistance to Africa. It is co-ordinated by the World bank and it has mobilised $6 billion to support poor countries in Africa which had excessive debt burdens and were pursuing a viable adjustment strategy. Currently, 21 countries are eligible for assistance under this facility.

Britain pledged £250 million to the first multi-donor SPA programme—more than 9 per cent. of total bilateral pledges. A successor to the SPA is currently being negotiated, with a target of $8 billion—about a one third increase on the previous level. Our contribution will be at least at the level of SPA 1.

It is still early days, but the results of economic reform programmes are encouraging. The economies of the countries participating in the special programme of assistance have grown by an average of 3·5 per cent. per year since 1985. That compares with less than 1 per cent. per annum in the early 1980s.

Ghana adopted a reform programme in 1983 after years of decline. As a result, real gross domestic product has grown by 5 per cent. per annum, real investment by 13 per cent. per annum and exports by 19 per cent. per annum —a highly creditable performance. The economy is more efficient, manufacturing capacity has been brought back into operation, and inputs and consumer goods are more widely available.

The reforms help the poorest by shifting the terms of trade in favour of the rural sector, where most of the poor live. In addition, an essential part of our approach to economic reform is to help the poorest people to take advantage of the opportunities which the reforms present. Extra help is given in practical and specific ways agreed between us and the recipients. For example, we are contributing £1·5 million in Ghana for non-formal education aimed at improving female literacy. All such education, wherever it takes place, helps a country to build up its strength.

Female literacy is a great need throughout the world. Nearly two thirds of the world's illiterates are women, and they number over 1,000 million people. In Malawi, we are assisting programmes to increase income-earning opportunities for women and poor urban families. Wherever one looks, there are specific, closely designed programmes to help the need of the country and of the specific area of the country.

Sound economic management is not the whole picture. Only last week, the annual high level meeting of the development assistance committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reaffirmed its conviction that

"There is a vital connection between open, democratic and accountable political systems, individual rights and substantial reductions in poverty."

The same message was earlier endorsed by both donors and recipients at the conference on the least developed countries in Paris in September. Underlying this is the belief that, for successful development, the people of the developing world need to have a stake in their countries' development. That has complex implications for our aid management. The challenge is to achieve effective and accountable institutions, so vital for development, but each country needs to be considered individually.

Two cases where the scales have tipped negatively are Sudan and Somalia, where we and others have judged that we can no longer provide effective long-term aid. For most countries, however, our task is to help them in the right direction. This is not a crusade. It is about helping those who want to help themselves. We have therefore particularly welcomed the recommendations of the recent conference in Kenya on political reform. The reforms proposed, taken together with the recent announcement that security of tenure for the judiciary would be restored, mark an important step in the right direction.

We can help the process towards better government in many ways. First, we must send a clear message of support to those committed to better government. We have been at the forefront of discussion on this among donors and recipients. Secondly, we can provide more practical assistance. We have just agreed to provide electoral assistance for Nepal, together with training for members of its parliamentary secretariat.

In Uganda, we are funding the appointment of judges, training court staff and providing legal text books. In Namibia, one of our senior Clerks from this House has been providing advice on parliamentary procedures. In addition, we have provided advice on civil service structures and other matters.

Better government is not just about the institutions and the people at the centre of government. It is about what happens at a local level. This brings me to another aspect of our approach—good project design and management.

The key to that is to have the right systems in place and the right people to apply them. A case in point is our approach to slum improvement projects in the sub-continent. From Dr. Khan in the Orangi slum in Karachi, we learned a lot about the approach needed if improvements were to be effective and sustainable. Our slum improvement projects in India now cover health, education and income generation, as well as infrastructural improvement.

Another new and central element is the involvement of people living in the slum communities in the decision taking about new facilities and their maintenance. That called for the municipal authorities to acquire new skills and reorganise their priorities. The concept is being replicated in ODA-funded slum projects in Pakistan and five Indian cities.

Another good example of the encouragement of local participation is our support for the Bangladesh rural advancement programme. The aims of the programme are to alleviate poverty with special emphasis on the landless poor. It operates through a village network to provide training in management skills and to make available a revolving loan fund for income generation activities. Among other things, our help will establish a self-supporting bank that will help to maintain the programme on a sustainable basis.

In Gokwe in Zimbabwe, we are supporting a programme to strengthen the institutional capacity of district and provincial planners. The programme is modelled on similar ODA-supported schemes in Zambia. It tackles the chronic problems of management and implementation capacity, which are major constraints on

development, particularly in the social sectors. By encouraging the participation of local people, it generates not only commitment, but greater local accountability.

We have achieved what we have in our projects and programmes only because we have been well served by British expertise in research and design. I pay tribute to all those, from many walks of life, who have worked for years, particularly in the past 10, to improve our programmes. Without them, we would not be so effective in delivering our aid.

Although the GATT negotiations are not an essential part of this debate, they are essential for the life of the developing world. I greatly regret that we did not achieve a successful outcome of the GATT negotiations in Brussels. That was no fault of my right hon. Friends the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Our developing countries need trade just as much as they need aid—they get three quarters of their income from trade and only one quarter from aid. In January, when the talks are resumed, our efforts will be absolutely critical for the future of the developing world. I hope that our American colleagues, and some of our European ones, take to heart what the outcome could be if those GATT negotiations do not liberalise trade for the sake of the developing world.

It is important to consider problems associated with the environment and the population. Most environmental problems know no boundaries; therefore, more than almost any other challenge, the environment requires a truly collaborative international effort. This decade, environmental diplomacy will become a key theme of international politics—of that there is no doubt, especially as we work towards the major UN conference on environment and development that will be held in Brazil in 1992. It is vital that developing countries participate fully in the international effort, and we are assisting them to do so.

The Government's commitment to environmental issues is plain from our White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", published in September, which makes clear our commitment to sustainable development. That means living on the earth's income rather than its capital. That way, we may hand down to future generations the natural and man-made wealth they will need if living conditions are to improve.

We have made much progress in the past three years. The British aid programme is now as green as any. More than 300 of the ODA's staff at home and overseas have been trained to use our environmental assessment manual. Our procedures are recognised by the German aid agency and the European Commission, both of which use our manual. They are recognised by organisations such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, which sends its staff on our training courses. In other words, we have made some first and critical steps towards improving environmental acceptability of the projects needed in the developing world.

Our environmental appraisal procedures apply equally to projects under the aid and trade provision. We recognise that such projects need careful environmental assessment and I am glad to say that the ODA's procedures have improved dramatically in that respect compared with 10 years ago.

Global environmental problems, like climate change, pose special problems for everyone. I mentioned earlier the Government's plans for the growth of the aid budget for developing countries. In addition, we have just created a separate new item of public expenditure for global environmental assistance. From this, we will make our contribution to the new global environment facility. The GEF will be managed by the World bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme. It is designed to help developing countries tackle global environmental problems such as climate change and the loss of the biological diversity of our plant and animal species.

The facility will be different from traditional aid programmes. It will fund only projects which, while they have significant global benefits, would not be justified by the national benefits to the country concerned. Two weeks ago, we announced that Britain would contribute £46 million to the facility. That makes us one of the first and leading contributors.

We want the GEF to become the funding mechanism to help developing countries comply with proposed conventions on climate change and biodiversity that we hope to see agreed by 1992. It will fund projects such as one to cap flaring from natural gas in Nigeria, which alone accounts for 0·2 per cent. of man-made global CO_2 production. Another project under consideration is one to establish 15 conservation areas in Mexico, to ensure that the protection of Mexico's unique plant and animal species is maintained.

It is now clear that the developing world is likely to be the first, and worst, affected by climate change. The livelihoods of millions could be wrecked by the effects of rises in sea level. One has only to think of the beautiful but low-lying Maldive islands to appreciate the problem. We must also plan to help the hundreds of millions, especially in Africa, who could suffer from changes in rainfall and the loss of agricultural productivity. I shall deal with the special and desperate situation in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere later. The first priority is to help developing countries to understand the threat and to plan to deal with it. We are already helping Bangladesh to deal with existing flood problems. In December 1989 we hosted the major international pledging conference for the Bangladesh flood action plan. In addition, we are financing seminars for Ministers from developing countries on the results of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change. The first one takes place in Mauritius on Monday. We have also offered the Governments of Kenya and Ghana finance for studies on the impacts of climate change on their countries.

We will be helping developing countries to play a full part in the preparation of a global convention on climate change when negotiations begin in February.

We are also helping developing countries limit their contribution to global warming. That is one of the key aims of our energy efficiency initiative, under which we are indentifying a number of countries such as India, China, Ghana and Nigeria for increased assistance. We have already made a grant of £50 million to India to help improve its energy efficiency.

Perhaps the gravest environmental threat facing the developing world is deforestation. The main responsibility for managing tropical forests rests with the governments of the countries which house them, but we can help and are helping. Two years ago, we were financing 80 projects at a cost to the taxpayer of £45 million. Now, there are over 200 projects in progress or in preparation at a cost of £160 million.

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

Our contribution is part of an overall international effort, so I shall comment on developments in strengthening international action. A number of hon. Members have rightly been concerned at the need to reform the tropical forestry action plan, the TFAP. It is more than a year since I called for a real reform of the TFAP. An independent review was established, which made recommendations in June. Good progress was made at the governing council of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation in Rome three weeks ago.

Britain's chief natural resources adviser has been asked to advise on the establishment of an independent new consultative group to guide the work of TFAP. Therefore, we are right in there, ensuring that reform takes place. That will help to make TFAP more open, effective and accountable, and we expect 1991 to deliver these reforms. More than 80 tropical countries are voluntary parties to TFAP, and that is why the mechanism needs to be made effective and to work.

The International Tropical Timber Organisation also has a key role to play, especially in making sure that traded timber comes from well managed sources. My Department has taken over the lead on the ITTO in Whitehall, because ITTO is increasingly concerned with the better management of forests. We are working towards the next meeting of the ITTO council in May, which will be looking, in particular, at incentives to help developing countries to manage their forests sustainably.

At the Worldwide Fund for Nature symposium this week on sustainably managed timber, I committed us to a roundtable discussion to look at incentives. We are already funding a key study on labelling, and there is more that I hope we shall be able to do in that matter.

On many environmental problems, we are learning by doing. We are also carrying out major natural resources research programmes, now running at £25 million a year. The twin pillars of sound science and sound economics underpin our work. That is why we play an integral part in the decision-making process on the European Community's science and technology development programme for developing countries.

I pay particular tribute to the outstanding British organisations with which we work, such as the ODA's own Natural Resources Institute, the Oxford Forestry Institute, the International Institute for Environment and Development, the Institute of Hydrology and many others. The British expertise that is being contributed to sustainable environmental development across the world is nothing short of outstanding. ODA funds much of that, but the British effort, in institutes and universities, is remarkable.

The environment will remain fragile and in danger if we do not tackle the other great problem ahead. If the world's population continues to grow at its present rate, there is no way that environmental resources can fulfil our needs. The world's population has doubled since 1950. It will double again, to 10 billion or more, during the next century, by about the year 2050. About 95 per cent. of that increase in population will occur in developing countries.

Most developing country Ministers whom I meet recognise that rapid population growth is an important problem. Many are committed to trying to tackle it. There are some positive signs. Over 40 per cent. of couples throughout the world now try to plan whether or not they will have children; 300 million more want to do so, but have no access to family planning services.

We know of many societies where, despite intense health education, couples do not want to take action to limit family size. That may be for religious or cultural reasons, but once the benefits of a planned family are well understood, surprisingly good progress can be made. Dr. Mechai of Thailand has proved that.

A central issue in population planning is the role and status of women and their ability to contribute successfully to stable family development. Women must have better education and employment opportunities. They must have access to better health care, with high quality services for infertility and sexually-transmitted diseases. The AIDS epidemic, with which we must also deal, heightens the urgency. But men have health responsibilities, too. Frequently, women in the Third world must rely on them to ensure that they get a fair deal.

I described the way in which our emphasis on good government has shaped the way we work with developing countries on new projects. The same applies to population. We have developed firm principles to guide our aid for population. We believe that every child should be a wanted child and that each couple should have the right of access to means for regulating fertility.

The British Government do not support the use of any forcible measures to limit family size or increase the use of contraception. It must be up to couples to decide their actions on the basis of choice, which must be available to all.

All the ODA's health advisers now look for opportunities to do more work on population and women's health. We are training our other advisers and administrators to find similar opportunities. That is all part of our programme to increase support for population activities. We have already helped to increase the availability of family planning services in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Kenya. We have plenty more to do in the years ahead. We often achieve the best results through working more closely with multilateral population agencies, including the United Nations population fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. I am discussing how we can increase our support for them.

The NGOs, the private sector and the academic community have a major role to play in our bilateral work. This year, we agreed a five-year programme of increased support to the Liverpool and London schools of tropical medicine. Early next year we intend to meet major British NGOs, to share ideas on population assistance and to draw on their experience and strength. We expect to do more in partnership with the private sector. We want to do more to ensure that we get the best British brains and energy to back us in this important task.

I come to the dreadful prospect of famine in Africa, a subject which is of great concern to the whole House. We are all aware of the deteriorating situation in the Horn of Africa and particularly the threat of famine in Ethiopia and Sudan. We and the NGOs have been fully alive to this prospect during 1990 and have been working steadily at our programme of assistance throughout the year.

As a result, the Government have so far this year provided over £23 million in emergency aid to Ethiopia and Sudan. We are now well advanced in preparing our emergency programmes for next year. Crucial in this

planning are the reports coming in from the World Food Programme and FAO crop assessment missions to Ethiopia and Sudan.

It is clear already that there will be severe famine and widespread loss of life in Ethiopia and Sudan next year unless action is taken by the international community to help those desperate people. If those nations were free of war, their chances of survival would improve. With our NGO partners, we shall, in the coming few days, decide exactly what further assistance to provide in the Horn of Africa to help avoid a similar catastrophe to that which occurred in 1984-85.

Apart from the crisis in the horn of Africa, there are crises in countries such as Angola and Mozambique. I assure the House that we have not lost sight of those and the many other humanitarian problems that are to be faced across the world. We shall be doing all we can to provide the necessary emergency aid. The development challenges of the 1990s reflect a fast changing world.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister said that she was anxious to help the people of the horn of Africa. She should be telling the Prime Minister and the rest of her colleagues in the Government that that area will not be greatly helped if we take part in an all-out assault in a war in the middle east. Action of that type would certainly not help the countries in need to which she has referred.

May I offer the right hon. Lady some advice about money? We do not need hypocrisy from Administrations who have cut overseas aid by about a half since the Conservatives came to office and who have bailed out the four national clearing banks in Britain—National Westminster, Midlands, Lloyds and Barclays—to the tune of £3 billion in the last four years. Why do they not——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mrs. Chalker: The development challenges of the 1990s reflect a fast-changing world. We need to respond flexibly to those changes, which means that we must address them country by country, sector by sector. Britain alone cannot solve the problems of the developing world. We do not try to—we try to work with our partners in the Community, the World bank and all the other organisations in which, together, we can begin to solve some of the problems and find new ideas that will help the developing world. We have been doing that solidly during the past five years, and I am determined that we shall continue to make a real and major contribution. I am delighted to be doing this job, because I am committed to an improvement in the state of the people of the developing world, as well as the lives of the people of Britain.

10.10 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My colleagues and I welcome the opportunity to debate the Government's claimed progress in promoting economic reform and addressing population growth and the environment in developing countries. Those are vital issues and I only wish that we had the opportunity to debate the Government's development policy more often, in their time, rather than ours. This is the first debate on development policy initiated by the Government in a year and a half. There has not been a statement to the House by a Minister for Overseas Development since 1984, which is a disgrace. It is a sign of how little the Government care about development.

I welcome the Minister's comments this morning about her proposals to look urgently and in detail at the current famine in Africa—we realise that, in five African countries, the position is dire and that millions of people will die soon unless emergency aid is provided by the developed world. I hope that there will be an opportunity to debate that subject in more detail as soon as possible. Those of us who have been to countries like Ethiopia know how desperate are the needs of those countries.

For Africans in particular, this decade has been a disaster. In developing Africa, average income per person fell by 1·7 per cent. each year. Investment, export, imports and commodity prices also fell. Meanwhile, debt doubled to $256·9 billion. By the end of the 1980s, there were more than 150 million people severely hungry and under-nourished in Africa. Despite all that, in 1988, Africa paid the industrialised countries $21·7 billion—more than we gave them in aid or loans. That is the reality. It is one of the reasons for the current famine, which is due not only to the weather, but to the fact that Africa is being bled dry by the developed world.

Before discussing the three main issues of economic reform, environment and population, I shall put the Government's policy and contribution to overseas development in context. The 1980s were a disaster for development. The progress of previous decades was rolled back in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Since 1979, the British Government have slashed the aid budget. This year, problems have been compounded by the Gulf crisis, increased oil prices, loss of remittances from the Gulf, the cost of resettlement of refugees, slower world economic growth and the diversion of attention from poverty in the Third world to the needs of eastern Europe.

In response, the Government have refused extra help to compensate for higher oil prices, and have dipped into the Third world's meagre pot to help out Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. Development is affected not only by the policies of the ODA but by the policies of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Departments of Trade and Industry, of Energy and of the Environment, and the Treasury. The present Government seem unaware of that. We have rarely heard other Ministers even refer to the implications of their policies for overseas development. The insensitivity of Ministers may be because the Government do not have a coherent policy on overseas development. Where is the policy?

The new east-west relationship has changed the position of developing countries enormously, but there has been no reassessment of development policy by the Government. They have never even produced a White Paper on development. Surely they cannot still be relying on the last Labour Government's 1978 paper, "More Aid for the Poorest". When can we expect to see such a policy document?

The title of today's debate is typical. The Government have picked three of the most important issues in development, affecting millions of people's lives, and thrown them together in one debate. Why not have a debate on the alleged success of all the Government's development policies, on their overall strategy? I expect the difficulty arises because there is no such strategy. One might be expected to find details of the Government's

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

strategy for overseas development in the British overseas aid annual review for 1990, but that fails to provide any sign of overall strategy.

The Minister should take credit that her Department has, during the past year, produced many glossy publications with nice pictures, but she may take some of the blame for the Government's lack of vision and strategy. But perhaps the priority assigned to development is best illustrated by its miserly aid budget. Not only has British aid fallen dramatically as a percentage of gross national product since 1979, but in real terms, by whichever expenditure measure one uses, Britain is still spending considerably less on overseas aid than it was in 1979.

As for the quality of aid, British aid last year went to more than 130 countries, including several that are not in the poorest category, such as Turkey, Portugal and Israel. The National Audit Office report published earlier this year gave several examples of how commercial considerations have frequently taken precedence over development needs in shaping aid policy under the Government. I do not want to repeat the many criticisms of the quantity and quality of aid that I have made in previous debates initiated by the Opposition, so I shall consider today's topics of environment, population and economic policy.

A new Government vision is needed most on environmental issues but, sadly, that is the sphere where it is most lacking. The only document that could possibly be called a policy document is the green glossy one produced in May, which lists project after project, sector after sector, and the many agencies and institutions with which the ODA works. It witters on about the importance of sustainable development, but totally fails to provide a vision of what it is and how to achieve it. It fails to emphasise that sustainable development requires a total change in the way we live and plan our lives, as well as an overhaul of the process of development in developing countries, and thus an overhaul of policy of development agencies such as the ODA.

If anything is to be done about poverty, world industrial production must, according to the Brundtland report, increase by five or ten times over the next 50 years. If that increase in production is to be sustainable, the technologies employed must be at least five to 10 times more efficient in their use of natural resources. There is no sign that any Government Department is responding to that challenge.

Let us examine the record. The Government proudly proclaimed a contribution of £9 million to enable countries such as India and China to phase out CFCs in compliance with the Montreal protocol. Developing countries certainly need financial help if they are to meet their global obligations, and I welcome the fact that aid for global environmental projects is separate from and additional to the aid budget for development projects. But while allocating that £9 million the Government in 1989 spent £80 million on energy projects and £30 million on mining in developing countries. These are projects which, if the record is anything to go by, will destroy the land and pollute the atmosphere in the countries concerned.

As the Minister said this morning, the Government recently announced that they will contribute £46 million to the new global environmental fund of the World bank —the United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme. I welcome that pledge and the fact that it is additional to the aid budget; but closer inspection reveals that the £9 million for CFC substitutes will be taken out of the £46 million contribution to the new environmental fund.

This is not surprising. The £100 million for tropical forests announced by the former Prime Minister and frequently boasted about by other Ministers was not new money either. The £46 million is less than half what the Government are spending on the aid and trade provision projects this year. ATP projects too often work in direct opposition to environmental goals because they often subsidise the export of out-of-date technologies which are no longer in demand in the United Kingdom and are no longer allowed in many European Community countries.

The old-fashioned equipment used at the Rihand power station in India, with no flue gas desulphurisation, is typical. The Minister claimed this morning that ODA procedures have improved dramatically since. I remind her that the ODA's power sector mission in India reported in 1986 that additional energy would be most cost-effectivelly provided by the improved repair and maintenance of existing power stations and by more effective distribution, not by building new power stations.

Mrs. Chalker: I remind the hon. Lady that that is exactly why we have given £50 million to India for energy efficiency—to use existing equipment but to make it more efficient and to stop the waste of energy caused by some of the technology put in during the 1970s. It is wasteful technology, and we have to put it right. That is why we are tackling the problem job by job—to ensure that the money is wisely used to improve what is already there.

Mrs. Clwyd: I thank the Minister for that explanation. Can she explain why the ODA has carried on targeting aid on new power stations as well? Phase 2 of the Rihand power station is going ahead, I believe—

Mrs. Chalker: *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Clwyd: —and I believe that flue gas desulpherisation is still the order of the day on phase 1 of that power station.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford) *rose*——

Mrs. Clwyd: I shall give way in a moment.

New power stations mean more jobs for the boys back home and more prestige for the recipient Government, whereas, as the power sector mission pointed out, repairing and maintaining existing systems involve high local costs and militate against the use of tied aid.

So, with only 10 per cent. of British aid untied—one of the lowest percentages of all OECD donors—it is easy to see why the ODA is still funding power stations, despite all its protestations to the contrary. It is fine to support British industry, but not at the expense of the third world.

Mr. Wells: One of the principal reasons for supporting the further production of electricity in India is the conservation of the environment. The unavailability of electricity for rural and urban populations means that the source of cooking heat has to be trees or wood. The construction of power stations in India will be a major conservation measure for the environment.

Mrs. Clwyd: I know the hon. Gentleman well enough to know that he would not claim that polluting the atmosphere in India, in the interests of providing people with electricity—I do not accept that that is the way to provide them with it—is the way forward. The massive pollution caused by phase 1 of the Rihand power station complex was heavily criticised by the National Audit Office in its report on aid to India. I do not believe that even Conservative Members would claim that the station has been an enormous environmental success.

It is not surprising that recipients suspect the ODA of funding forestry projects overseas for our own benefit rather than for their development. Let us take the example of the Karnataka—the so-called social forestry—project in India. It is heralded as an example of local participation. I understand that the Minister hopes that it will become a showcase of a reformed tropical forestry action plan, but the main community group in the area, Fevord Karnataka, has been unable to find details of the proposed project. The local forestry office refused the group documents. It wrote to the Minister for Overseas Development but she has apparently not replied. The suspicions seem well founded, since half the forest will be designated zone 2, a no-go area for local people. I hope that no Conservative Member will claim that this is an example of good practice.

People in the area think that the Government are funding a sink for the carbon emissions that Britain produces, and cloaking that as development. I remind the House that we are major polluters. United Kingdom citizens emit 2·64 tonnes of global warming gases each year, whereas Indians emit one tenth of that. If this is the best the Government can do to involve local people in forestry projects, they should give up right now. If they can do better, perhaps the Minister will tell us how.

It is essential for the sake of millions of people in the Third world, as the Minister said, to take immediate action to prevent or limit global warming. The thought that 68 million people would lose their land if the sea rose by one metre in Egypt, Bangladesh, Vietnam and China alone should be enough to spur the industrialised countries into action. Millions more farmers would be devastated by the effect of a warmer climate, particularly in arid lands. With 10 million people facing famine in Ethiopia and Sudan, and millions more in Angola, Liberia and Mozambique, the potential disaster is barely imaginable.

The Government's inaction on Britain's carbon emissions and their foot dragging in European and international talks makes it clear that the voice of the Third world is not getting through. Perhaps that is because no one around the Cabinet table cares enough to make their point on their behalf.

To return to the new global environmental facility, I am delighted that the World bank has realised the need to finance environmental improvements, but the new environmental fund will undermine long-term sustainable development if it means that the bank can once again ignore the environmental effects of the rest of its work. Over the years, there has been a litany of environmentally disastrous projects backed by the World bank. There is increasing evidence that some structural adjustment programmes harm the environment as well as the poor. It is essential for the bank to review all its lending policies if it wants to promote sustainable development.

In their green glossy, the Government claim that the ODA encourages and supports the efforts of multilateral agencies to incorporate environmental objectives in structural adjustment programmes. I doubt whether the Minister can give much evidence of that. It is ironic that, in the week in which we are debating the lack of a Government strategy on sustainable development, the Dutch parliament has approved its Government's new White Paper on sustainable development.

The Dutch are not just tinkering. The environment and ecology unit is expanding from two people to 14, and its budget is to increase fivefold, from 50 million guilders this year to 275 million guilders in 1994. The Dutch White Paper does not talk just about aid but deals with every issue affecting developing countries, including trade, the new east-west relationship, and the international economy. It seeks out a whole new definition of welfare, because GNP growth, the traditional objective of policy and the indicator of success, simply ignores the status of the environment and hence the real welfare of the people and the planet.

The Dutch White Paper recognises the enormous impact that trade can have on the environment. Our Government also understood the connection, when they promised at the Bergen conference to take environmental considerations into account in trade negotiations. In the GATT talks over the past few months, that promise has been broken, and British negotiators have pushed the environment to the bottom of their in-trays or dumped it in the nearest wastepaper basket.

The Minister rightly emphasised the important negotiations for the Third world, but was the Minister at those negotiations? The GATT proposals would severely limit the ability of Third world Governments to regulate foreign companies involved in logging, dumping toxic waste, or mining. Legislation to protect scarce resources, such as the bans on the export of unprocessed tropical timber in Indonesia and the Philippines, would have to be repealed, because such legislation affects trade. Again, the Government have put free trade above environmental protection.

At last the Government have recognised the link between environmental damage and population growth. It is ironic that that priority received just 1 per cent. of aid expenditure in 1989. The Development Assistance Committee tables released this week show that Belgium, Denmark and Finland all spend more than 10 per cent. of their aid on health and population. On average, DAC donors spend 6·7 per cent. on that crucial sector but Britain spends only 2·9 per cent.

The planet will simply not be able to support 15 billion people. For the past 12 years, food production per person has fallen by 1·3 per cent. each year, and in several African and Asian countries, the population already exceeds the carrying capacity of the land. The demand for water is already growing several times faster than population. In the middle east, disputes over water underlie much of the tension and strife.

We must not forget the other reason for population issues being so important. Women need access to family planning for their own good health and their children's health and to give them the power to control their lives. That is why the issue of population cannot be considered in isolation. In 31 countries, women have virtually no access to family planning. That is why it has to be part and parcel of projects to improve women's health, education and status.

[Mrs. Clwyd]

One of the clearest lessons of the last decade is that investment in women improves not only the quality of life, but is the best and quickest way to reduce the growth of population. Therefore, it is all the more disgraceful that the Government have failed to reach out to women and have failed to emphasise the kind of education that Third world women need.

One of the saddest parliamentary answers that I received from the ODA was on the percentage of women who are beneficiaries of ODA projects. The answer was 50 per cent., and it was based on the assumption that, as 50 per cent. of the population are women, therefore 50 per cent. of the beneficiaries must be women. If all the literature on women and development has taught us one thing, it is that women are systematically excluded from the development process unless their participation is actively sought.

The only multilateral organisation that actively works with women is UNIFEM, but the United Kingdom's contribution to that has sunk by three quarters in real terms since 1979. The Minister stresses the importance of female literacy. Literacy is vital in enabling women to control their own lives, to care for their families, to deal with the rest of the world and to improve their status. UNIFEM figures show a clear link between women's education and the reduction in infant mortality. However, the Government have refused to spend a single extra penny in international literacy year which aims to help the world's one billion illiterates to read.

The world conference on education for all in Thailand in March seems to have passed the ODA by. The Minister has stressed the importance of literacy. Why do the Government not undertake a new initiative on education, become leaders in the education-for-all strategy and set out to discover just how fast the birth rate can be reduced while producing innumerable other benefits?

I shall now deal with the Government's progress in promoting economic reform. In the 1980s, the ODA vigorously pursued the cause of structural adjustment, tying aid funds to World bank and IMF adjustment programmes. Meanwhile, other more enlightened donors were realising the devastating effects of traditional structural adjustment on people, especially the poor, and began using their money to cushion the worst effects of adjustment on the poor. Our Government have not done that but continue to view structural adjustment as the magic key to development.

The evidence of the 1980s has raised some fundamental questions about adjustment. The most important question is how to avoid the social and environmental damage that adjustment programmes have so far produced. Although the need for adjustment with a human face is increasingly recognised, in most cases compensation for the poor is simply added on after the economic squeeze. Even the programme to mitigate the social costs of adjustment accounts for only 6 per cent. of the estimated total cost of Ghana's adjustment programme.

We need a fundamental review of the adjustment formula. That does not mean shirking tough financial decisions or avoiding change: it means adjustment based on investment in people, the best resource that most countries have. Now even the World bank realises that structural adjustment must itself be adjusted. More than 1 billion people live on less than $1 a day. This year's world development report makes it clear that to reduce that number to even 825 million will require major changes in the policies of developing country Governments and industrialised country donors.

In September, the president of the World bank stated in his report to the development assistance committee that real progress in poverty reductions could be achieved through the adoption by developing countries of coherent national strategies. He says that that is the kind of policy reform that agencies should promote and he described two basic elements of such strategies. The first are policies to promote efficient and sustainable growth. That may sound old hat, but there is a new definition of efficient. It means growth that uses intensively poor people's most abundant resource, labour, thus creating income-earning opportunities for the poor. Is that the kind of efficiency that British aid will promote from now on?

The second basic element of a national anti-poverty strategy is the extension of basic services—health care, education and access to family planning. This investment in human capital not only benefits the poor but boosts the prospects of growth. In future, will the ODA restrict support for structural adjustment only to those programmes that protect and extend expenditure on social services? The World bank has recognised that sound macro-economic policies are important only as the one part of a national strategy to reduce poverty through efficient and sustainable economic growth. Will Government policy to promote economic reform also recognise this from now on?

The IMF world bank paper also makes clear the importance of external economic conditions. It says:

> "Sustained growth in developing countries is dependent on stable real prices of traded goods, steady expansion of foreign markets, and the availability of foreign financing on appropriate gate terms."

External economic conditions are grim—third-world debt stands at $1,200 billion, commodity prices are at an all-time low, exchange rates in the United Kingdom remain high, the oil price has soared and, now, plans to open up world trade have collapsed.

A recent World bank report of the effect of industrial countries' policies on developing countries estimates that industrial country protectionism reduces developing country national income by roughly twice the amount provided by official development assistance. I simply do not understand how the Government can argue for structural adjustment in developing countries while ignoring the desperate need for adjustment of the global economy.

Mr. Conable recommended that donors increase their aid and focus it more clearly on poverty-reducing activities, saying again that bilateral donors should give much greater weight to an assessment of recipients' efforts to foster sustained reduction of poverty when deciding upon the allocation and composition of the development aid programme. Are the Government willing to give more aid to Governments who invest in the poor and give only carefully targeted anti-poverty aid to Governments who do nothing for the poor?

I have to assume that the answer is no, because, for all the talk of good governance and aid conditionality, this year not a single British Minister has mentioned

anti-poverty strategies in the definition of good governance. In his speech on Africa in June, the Foreign Secretary said that Governments who

"tend towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights, market principles, should be encouraged."

He did not mention policies to reduce poverty. Nor were such policies mentioned in his article on aid conditionality, in his party magazine, "Crossbow".

The Minister for Overseas Development, in an answer to a parliamentary question, stated:

"Economic and social progress depends to a large degree on effective and honest government, political pluralism, observance of the rules of law and sound market-based economic policies."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1990; Vol. 176, c. 269.]

Again, there is no mention of poverty. Many of these goals are worthy, as I am sure my hon. Friends will agree, but good governance must include policies for the poor. The Conservative party does not mention them, but we believe they are essential.

What of the other aspects of good governance, particularly political reform? The political changes in Africa and in eastern Europe and the moves towards the multi-party system are welcome. However, I question how much we can thank the ODA for this. Human rights are new in the rhetoric of this Government, but they are a long-standing concern of the Labour party. For years, we have been demanding, but with little success, that the ODA and other Government Departments stop supporting tyrannical Governments with arms sales, trade deals and lavish diplomatic support.

Nevertheless, I cannot give a whole-hearted welcome to the Government's apparent change of heart in the Foreign Secretary's speech in June. I do not trust them to support these principles consistently, because the record shows that they will always put politics before people. They proved that in Nicaragua, where, having given millions to the dictator Somoza, they refused aid to the first Government of, for and by all the people. They used the excuse of human rights abuses, among others, to maintain an aid embargo on Vietnam and Cambodia. Vietnam, one of the poorest and most war-devastated countries, is now struggling to achieve its own version of perestroika. Neither country has a spotless human rights record, but they are a long way from being the worst.

Meanwhile, the Government provided free military training to the Filipino presidential guard, despite evidence of brutal torture and execution carried out by it in 1988. The Government sold military equipment to the Chinese after Tiananmen square, to Pinochet's regime in Chile and to Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: This has nothing to do with the aid programme.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Foreign Secretary thinks that it has a lot to do with the aid programme. Whatever the Minister thinks, she has mentioned it many times as one of the conditions of aid.

How has this new policy been implemented since June? It has been applied to the Sudan and Somalia, but human rights abuses in Kenya and Ghana, two British favourites, have studiously been ignored. Kenya was the second largest recipient of British aid last year, and Ghana the fourth. The Minister mentioned civil service reform in Ghana, but that is not the only reform that should be pursued there. After the riots and mass arrests and the Government crackdowns in Kenya in July of this year, President Moi thanked the former Prime Minister in public for refraining from criticising his suppression of dissent and

"for ignoring those who were urging her to criticise Kenya."

As for Ghana, where the PNDC regime has maintained political repression and widespread abuse of human rights for nine years, the ODA appears to be as supportive as ever, as the Minister told us this morning. She has visited Ghana several times, but could not find time to talk to representatives of the Movement for Freedom and Justice in Ghana, who wanted to meet her in London.

If the Government cannot apply their principles consistently, they will achieve nothing but resentment and strife among both Governments and peoples of developing countries. What is lacking throughout the aid programme is consistency. Small changes have been made for the sake of having been seen to be green. There is much rhetoric about reaching the poor and women, but the reality is that the aid programme is too small, too commercial, too distorted, too irrelevant to other departments, too conservative—with a small and a capital C—to meet the real needs of the third world.

This week, the financial institutions made a profit of £1 billion from giveaway electricity privatisation—two thirds of the entire aid budget. Only when a British Government devote at least 0·7 per cent. of GNP to fighting poverty, and ensure that the needs of the developing countries are taken into account by all Government Departments, will they be able to claim progress in tackling the root causes of environmental degradation and rapid population growth and in promoting development for the world's poor. I have little hope that this Government will, at this late stage in their fortunes, come to realise their obligations, but I assure the House that the next Labour Government will.

10.48 pm

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): Fortunately, we shall have to wait a long time for the eventuality suggested by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd).

My right hon. Friend the Minister ranged widely and comprehensively over the subject of the debate, and in doing so, reflected the great extent of the work of the ODA and her deep knowledge of her subject. What she said amounted to a remarkable demonstration of the success that the Government are having in applying their development policy.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley drew attention, not unnaturally, to the amount of work that still needs to be done. Like her, I am always delighted to ask for more. I am sure that the Government will respond whenever possible. The hon. Lady should have given the Government more credit for some of their achievements. She criticised them for not doing more about third-world debt. I am sure that some of my hon. Friends will refer to that later. However, it is worth mentioning that Britain has led the way by cancelling the aid debts of 22 of the poorest countries, at a cost of almost £1 billion, with £263 million of that from African countries. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor, announced in September important new proposals for debt relief for the poorest countries that were pursuing economic reform. And Britain is the largest single contributor to the subsidy

[Sir Charles Morrison]

account of the enhanced structural adjustment facility of the International Monetary Fund, which lends £4·5 billion to low-income countries at highly concessionary rates.

It is ridiculous to pretend that the Government have a poor record on overseas debt. Of course, there continue to be huge problems, and they must be overcome, but the Government are tackling them with great energy.

Mr. Skinner: Amid all the hon. Gentleman's talk about cancelling the debt repayments of the third world, why does not he recognise the fact that since 1987 the Government have given £3 billion in tax relief to the top four clearing banks? Some banks are up to ther necks in debt from third-world countries. Rather than give such relief to the top four clearing banks, which make massive profits, why not give that money to third-world countries so that they can clear their debts? The Government would then be doing the decent thing, for a change.

Sir Charles Morrison: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman could have been listening to what I have been saying. The Government have a remarkable record. He may think that the record should be even more remarkable, but fortunately the electorate have consistently concluded for a long time, and will do so again, that the pie-in-the-sky policies suggested by the hon. Gentleman are not practicable. I shall continue to make my speech in the way that I intended.

I wish especially to refer to what my right hon. Friend the Minister called the other great problem—population growth. She should be congratulated on having initiated the debate. For the first time, it specifically links enonomic reform, the environment and population growth. She referred to the United Nations conference on the environment and development, which is to be held in Brazil in 1994. I am concerned that, to date, population growth has been left off the agenda. A preparatory meeting of western countries was held in May in Bergen, and a joint communique that followed that included only one reference to population in 21 pages of text. I hope that my right hon. Friend will do everything in her power to ensure that the issue of population growth is put on the agenda for the Brazil conference. Likewise, the environment should be considered for inclusion on the agenda for the next United Nations conference on population in 1994, which follows earlier conferences in 1974 and 1984.

The facts about world population growth have been repeated often, but it does no harm to repeat some of them again. I find it remarkable that during my lifetime the world's population has risen from 2 billion to almost 6 billion. As my right hon. Friend said, the population may stablise towards the end of the next century, but by then it will have doubled at least once more. It is estimated that before it stabilises, the population will be somewhere between 10 billion and 14 billion.

The reality of the current population position is somewhat worse than we assume. For example, a recent census in China showed that the population is 14 million higher than was originally estimated. It is difficult to grasp the scale of population growth. An editorial in *The Lancet* on 15 September stated:

"Global population grows by a remarkable 1 million more births than deaths every four days. If a bomb as destructive as the one that destroyed Hiroshima had been dropped every day since 6 August 1945, it would not have stabilised numbers."

The *British Medical Journal* of 3 October commented:

"The population bomb has exploded already. Twice as many people are alive in 1990 as were in 1950."

In fact, the world's population is increasing by three people every second. That is 250,000 a day.

The national and local scene is even more frightening than the global scene. For example, the population in Kenya doubles every 17 to 20 years, and the side effects of population growth are equally enormous. I and a number of other hon. Members visited India some two years ago. When we were in Bombay we were told that the rate of migration to that city—and this has nothing to do with internal population increases—was 1,500 people a day, 10,500 a week or 546,000 a year. I know that those statistics are staggering, but that is what is happening.

The impact of population growth on the environment, both urban and rural, is enormous. In particular, there is great pressure on croplands, forests and grasslands, which together with the sea supply our food and raw materials. Some 11 per cent. of the 13 billion hectares of the land on the world's surface is grassland; 25 per cent. is pasture for feeding animals; 31 per cent. is forest; and the remaining 33 per cent. is either wasteland—largely desert—or it has been built on or paved over. The area of cropland increased until 1981, but since then it has been diminishing as the newly reclaimed land is offset by that lost to degradation or converted to non-farm use.

Grassland has been shrinking since the mid-1970s, as overgrazing has converted it slowly to desert, particularly in the southern Sahara region. Forests have been shrinking for centuries, but that trend swiftly accelerated from the middle of the present century, and particularly from 1980 onwards.

Population is undoubtedly the greatest cause of those effects. The increasing number of livestock needed to match population growth places extra demand on grassland. In Africa in 1950, 238 million Africans relied on 272 million livestock. By 1987, the human population had increased to 604 million, the livestock numbers to 543 million. It is easy to appreciate the effect of that on soil.

The estimated population growth is responsible for about two thirds of deforestation in developing countries, most of which is due to forest clearance to provide more arable land. At the same time, the increase in non-agricultural land in the 15 years to 1986 was 58·7 million hectares, to meet the need for dwellings, factories, roads and so on. Population growth is, therefore, having a continuing and major effect on the appearance of the world's surface.

I visited Nepal as well as India two years ago, and clearly saw the effect of the clearance of trees from the hillsides to provide small patches of land on which to grow food. The consequence was that nothing remained to soak up the water, which, together with the soil, swiftly went down the hills and increased floods downstream, in Bangladesh—to which my right hon. Friend also referred. Work must be done there to cope with flooding, but it is equally important to cope with the population growth that is the cause of increased flooding in that country each year.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley—

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. As Cynon Valley has the highest male unemployment in

Wales, and the highest overall unemployment rate, it is called sign-on valley by some people, but the correct pronunciation uses a hard "c".

Sir Charles Morrison: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. I shall try to get it right in future. I used the pronunciation that I have heard from time to time on the radio and television, but I am delighted to be put right.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley referred to carbon dioxide, as did my right hon. Friend, and population growth has undoubtedly had an effect on greenhouse gases. It is estimated that worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide rose from 2,349 million tonnes in 1950 to 6,793 million tonnes in 1985, and it is calculated that population growth accounted for almost two thirds of that increase. Sheer numbers of people, together with their consumption of goods, food and raw materials and the technology that they use, has a major environmental effect.

Given that background, perhaps it is not surprising that the head of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, Dr. Nafis Savik, has written:

"The next 10 years will decide the shape of the 21st century. They may decide the future of the earth as a habitation for humans."

Therefore, slowing down the rate of population growth is an essential factor in any lessening of environmental damage.

What is to be done? Total United Kingdom aid in the current year is £1,620 million and next year will be £1,720 million, with continuing increases thereafter. Those sums may not be enough, but they are huge none the less—and in total, amount to a very generous contribution by not the Government but the British people and the British taxpayers. Aid for population programmes increased from £6·5 million in 1981 to £17·2 million in 1989. Even so, that amounts to only a little more than 1 per cent. of the total aid budget. Such is the importance of population aid, that that percentage should be much higher.

For some years past, the rate of population growth in a number of developing countries has been so high that, despite reasonable economic growth, standards of living have been falling. That must be contrary to the underlying philosophy of foreign aid. Instead of more people being enabled to live a better life, more are living a worse life —despite the fact that the overall wealth of their countries may be improving. There must be a greater effort to slow population growth rates, with still greater emphasis being placed on population programmes.

It strikes me that there is a certain hesitancy in a number of developing countries about asking for population aid. There could be a variety of reasons, but in some cases perhaps it is just that the countries feel that they should not seek aid for that particular purpose. But there is also a hesitancy on the part of some donor countries to provide sufficient aid for population programmes. Both donors and recipients should remember that vast numbers of people want smaller families—seeing that as a short cut to a better education and greater wealth.

In Bangladesh, where the family planning services have been available for a considerable time, not only did the total fertility rate fall from seven children to five between 1975 and 1989 but the present generation of women want only three children. If there is hesitancy about giving aid to Governments for population programmes, perhaps it will be possible for the British Government to give more aid to non-governmental organisations. Under the umbrella of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, there is a comprehensive, international network of family planning associations run by dedicated and enthusiastic staff. They need a huge increase in support for their work on health programmes, women's education, community development, and women's rights —all of which are undertaken as part of their family planning programmes. It should be remembered that NGOs allocate their resources more economically and effectively than Governments. For example, when I attended a conference in Quito in Ecuador last spring, one Latin American Member of Parliament told me that he reckoned that in some countries up to 90 per cent. of the money set aside for population programmes was used up by bureaucracy rather than for the provision of services. There is a great deal to be done and time is certainly not on our side.

In almost every respect, the quality of United Kingdom aid is high and it is well administered. Population aid should be increased steadily from the present proportion of about 1 per cent. to about 5 per cent. of the total. If that can be done, not only will it be enormously beneficial in controlling population growth but, as a consequence, it will be beneficial by sustaining the environment and helping to ensure economic development in the developing world.

11.10 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): At this time of year, one of the joys for grandparents is to join in the excitement and the nativity plays in schools. This week, one of the littlest Dunwoodys was appearing in a nativity play. I do not know whether it was typecasting, but he was playing a black sheep. I thoroughly enjoyed the play, except that at the back of my mind was a comparison between it and the nursery group which I had visited two weeks before, in a township in Namibia.

With other women from Socialist International I had the opportunity of travelling to meet women of the front-line states. We exchanged views and, I hope, useful plans for the future. I also had a chance to see some of the degradations and horrors that still exist throughout southern Africa.

One thing which saddens me about this morning's debate is that it is thought adequate for the House to debate the future health and happiness of vast populations all over the world on a Friday morning in a rather relaxed fashion, as though, when we leave here and go to our constituencies, we will have done our duty. Yet, because we are a developed country, and because we spend so little of our overall budget in ways that will change the quality of life and allow such children to have any future, I believe that we have a greater responsibility than we are demonstrating today.

Throughout the debate, it has been clear that the Government believe that as long as they are prepared to talk about the amounts of money that can be channelled into direct commercial arrangements, they have somehow fulfilled their task. There is a deep and underlying hypocrisy in the attitude of the European Economic Community and of Governments like our own, which believe that we can somehow or other look at overseas aid as though it were independent of other Government

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

policies. Too much of our aid is directly tied to commercial objectives. Too much of our aid is undermined by other Government policies.

I was delighted to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said about new commitment by the Dutch Government. I should be more delighted if that commitment was represented in a more positive way at Community level.

The African, Caribbean and Pacific countries' arrangements are almost automatically undermined by the Community's attitude to trade. Let us be clear what that means. The restrictive and protectionist policy of the European Economic Community act against the very trade policies of the countries that they most seek to help under the African, Caribbean and Pacific arrangements.

The Community views too many of its overseas partners as an easy means of generating minerals and money-making projects for developed European countries. The Community sees no illogicality in erecting barriers against the trade products of the third world, while pretending that it is seeking to assist with development budgets. That deep and underlying divergence of view makes it difficult to take seriously the suggestion that the Government want an extension of development elsewhere in the world.

I acquit the present Minister of any responsibility for the policies of many of her colleagues, but it is important for us to understand the poverty and misery about which we are talking. The women at the conference in Namibia —women from the front-line states—talked all the time about the realities of what is happening to them and the political dangers to which they are subjected every day. The women of Angola highlighted the fact that many of their children have run away, not only from the everyday violence of war, but from the dangers of conscription and pressure from both sides to join a war which is not of their making and which they wish to end.

Many children who live in the streets in towns in Namibia have run away from the hunger and death in their own countries. They are almost all young boys and they have no means of support. There is no easy way for the Namibian Government to incorporate them, and inevitably they live by crime and are constantly at risk.

The Namibian Government have been given little assistance by other countries to deal with the problem of their returnees. I was horrified to learn that 50,000 white civil servants, many of them young and almost all South African, remain in place in Namibia. If the Government want to take an immediate practical step in job creation and attacking poverty in Namibia, they could offer a positive resettlement scheme and assistance for those civil servants in South Africa and a training system to enable the black population to fill the jobs immediately. It is ridiculous for the incoming Government to have to face that situation.

For many African women, reality is violent—violence in the townships, and in the day-to-day problems that they face. I wish that there were some way in which one could organise a day of anger for the mothers of the world—a scream of fear and frustration for those women who know that they cannot feed or clothe their immediate families, and who know that the problem cannot be deferred until tomorrow. No matter how genuine and real our concern, when we talk about population control, we are not dealing with the problems that they have to deal with now.

During our meetings we also heard stories from the Angolans and representatives of other front-line states of the problems continually facing them. For example, the South African Government are still deliberately involved in political destabilisation and there are great pressures in the South African townships upon people with political problems. In many cases they are clearly exacerbated by the South African Government.

The Minister must understand that the Government should not support the removal of sanctions against South Africa before there is clear evidence of a change of mind by that Government. If she does not do so, she will contribute to the very anarchy and destabilisation that will wipe out all hope of a civilised life for those women and children.

When the women talked about the attacks that they face in their townships, their fears for their children and the lack of education and training, they were talking about something that they had to face day after day without any clear evidence of support from outside. We came from nine different European nations and they asked us to take back this message to not just our Governments but our people: that those who forget that we are not islands and that we have brothers and sisters who require our assistance are doing themselves little good in terms of creating a balanced society.

We were lucky in that we had with us the Swedish Trade Minister. She understands the close relationship between development and trade. Members of other European Parliaments and members of front-line states—women who had been elected to office—were also there. The one thing that we had in common, whatever our colour or religion—or, indeed, our girth—was our commitment to the creation of a movement that would make the urgency of the problems of the children of Africa clear to those who believe that one can talk of development in terms of gross domestic product, commitments or glossy pamphlets. The women of Africa require more than gestures; they require money, education and immediate support to feed and clothe their children and to put decent water into their townships.

When I went to the nativity play with my grandson, I thought, "I am privileged. I wish that I could bring that to every other mother in Africa."

11.21 am

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): May I say how wonderful it is to have such a tremendous Minister for Overseas Development still in her job, despite various other ministerial changes, and how very much I continue to welcome her energetic, enthusiastic and professional approach to her job. I am glad that my right hon. Friend did not move on. She succeeded another excellent Minister for Overseas Development. That excellence and drive have resulted in an increase in real terms in the aid programme since 1983 of which we can all be proud.

That approach can be sharply contrasted with the approach of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). Her approach to this subject is sour, misleading and wrong. I am surprised by that, because I know the hon. Lady personally and she does not exhibit that quality, but she has introduced that sour note into debates on the subject since she took up her present post.

Mrs. Dunwoody: What a load of nonsense.

Mr. Wells: The hon. Lady may consider it nonsense, but I feel that it is the case.

It is in order for the Opposition to criticise when the Government deserve criticism—perhaps in terms of the volume and direction of the aid budget. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley partly covered that, but not in the sense of being constructive. She was trying to destroy any such activity not just by the Government but by this country through the overseas development programme. A much better approach which was exhibited by her predecessors, would be to look on it creatively and constructively.

I should like to point out one little matter where the hon. Member for Cynon Valley was wrong. She claims that poverty was not mentioned in the official documentation issued this year on the British Government's aid programme. Under the heading "British aid policy", the 1990 annual review states:

"Aid priority: British aid comes in a variety of forms and its purpose is only too clear: the overriding aim is to help poor countries to help themselves in achieving self-sustaining growth and developing their societies in their own way."

That is a statement of British aid policy and its direction. Britain's aid programme is distinguished by the fact that 80 per cent. is given, donated or lent to poor countries —those countries where the per capita income is less than $700. That aid programme is helping in major ways in many countries.

I should have liked to cover several points—debt, aid quality, private investment, economic and political reform, aid administration and trade under the general agreement on tariffs and trade—but I do not believe that the House would tolerate my taking time to deal with all of them. I shall deal with just some.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) dealt with one of the overriding problems—population growth. When I was with the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in Zambia, I was depressed by the results of a survey of women to find out when they wanted to get married and how many children they wanted to have. More than 90 per cent. wanted to get married before they were 20, and they wanted to have more than 10 children as soon as they could after marriage. If that is the perception of the young women in Zambia, we are facing a problem in terms of lack of education and ignorance of population control measures and the way in which their behaviour will affect their lives and the lives of many other people in Zambia. I support my right hon. Friend the Minister—a serious programme is needed, backed by the British aid programme and the international community, to change those perceptions, and to provide the education that will do that.

The other major overriding issue which we cannot avoid is that of debt, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The debt situation is getting worse. I welcome what I must call the Chalker-Major initiative, which follows the Lawson initiative and tries to help the most indebted and impoverished countries. The Toronto terms were agreed first but, as my right hon. and hon. Friends will have noticed, we need a further initiative. The Trinidad terms are the beginning of that further initiative.

It is worth reminding the House that our Prime Minister had experience in the third world during his training and service with the Standard Chartered bank. He served in Jos in Nigeria, and has personal knowledge of the problems of the impoverished people of that country and a great deal of sympathy for those who suffer similar impoverishment in other countries. That bodes well for efforts to push forward a sensible and constructive programme dealing with the debt issue.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to press the new Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to make the new Trinidad terms endure longer, and to make certain that we take into account all the debts of a country and create a sort of debt mortgage, which, in many countries, will have to be combined with debt forgiveness. The amount that should be paid by indebted countries should be manageable and an amount that we can expect them to realise from their export earnings, leaving sufficient for them to continue to import the necessary spare parts and obtain support from outside to get their economies going.

Not only individual bilateral debts between one country and another but private sector debts, usually acquired through banks, must be renegotiated. We should roll up with those debts trade credits. The Export Credits Guarantee Department and other trade financing institutions in other countries have a major role to play in that. All debts must be taken together and a programme for a 25- to 30-year period must be worked out so that Ministers of Finance do not constantly parade in and out of Paris and London to reschedule their countries' debts.

My right hon. Friend the Minister must address the problem of indebtedness to international financial institutions. Before I deal with that, I congratulate her on the major part that she has played in finding a way round the rigidity of the international financial system as it affected Guyana. The British Government put in over £30 million to repay Guyana's outstanding indebtedness to the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. Canada also provided money and the United States of America provided a minuscule sum. The money went to repay the country's debts and its outstanding interest, and the lending programme at the IMF and World bank was started again. That was a constructive, and a risky move to take in Guyana, but I hope and pray that it will bear fruit in that devastated country.

We cannot apply the solution used in Guyana to many other countries. If we did, a large proportion, if not all, of our aid budget would be absorbed by such gestures. That is why we must persuade the international financial institutions to take a more responsible position on debt. They cannot continue to lend to such countries, particularly for project aid but also for programme aid. If underlying projects fail, the institutions cannot then demand that countries repay their debts in full, with interest, on time. The institutions must take responsibility for their investment programmes. A way must be developed to reschedule debts and probably revolve them so that the money is invested in creative projects to enable the country to earn the foreign exchange it needs eventually to repay its debts.

The current position of the World bank and the IMF is that they will not reschedule or forgive debt. They are resisting change in that position. The IMF has lent money from special funds to countries in sub-Saharan Africa over inappropriately short periods. The period is now seven years, which is a great advance on three years but it is still not sufficient to enable the countries to restructure.

The IMF is now demanding repayment. The only way in which that can be done is through the grant window of the International Development Association, but that

[Mr. Wells]

money should not be used for that purpose. It should be used for constructive and badly needed social projects such as housing, population control and health programmes. Repayment of debts is the wrong use of the IDA money, although I welcome the new IDA 9 settlement, which shows an increase over IDA 8. Nonetheless the settlement is far short of what is needed, particularly if it is to be used as a fund to repay international financial institutions.

I now turn to aid quality. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the excellent programme that she has initiated and supported in South Africa to assist the black population. She boosted the programme enormously in 1986. The budget has reached a total of £8 million, £4 million of which is spent directly on African education, which badly needs further support not only from Britain but from the international community if South Africa is to make the transition from an apartheid state to one which can run its affairs effectively and well.

Education under the Bantu Education Act is so deplorable that even able people come to universities without the necessary qualifications to enter them. The universities have tried desperately to raise the education of those people to standard university entry level. That effort costs enormous sums of money which the universities do not have. Our contribution to the programme is greatly appreciated, but it needs to be boosted and put on an international footing if we are to obtain sufficient money to help South Africa to catch up with what it should have been doing for many years.

The sensitivity of the programme in South Africa is fascinating. It has generated the most enormous enthusiasm in our embassy and on the part of our most excellent ambassador Sir Robin Renwick. Embassy staff are working hard in the townships producing admittedly tiny schools made out of corrugated iron in shack towns. Nevertheless, they are the first schools in those areas.

Our people are there helping the teachers to organise, teaching them and giving them time off to learn new techniques. They are equipping the schools with toys and learning equipment which otherwise would not be available. There would be no books, pencils, paper or other items of necessary and basic equipment if it were not provided by the British aid programme.

The British aid programme is also working in Alexandria, a most appalling township just outside Johannesburg. We have given money for the construction of houses for old age pensioners who do not have a home. We are supporting a home for old people, the director of which gave each one of the Members of Parliament who visited it, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), a big hug and a kiss on both cheeks.

The programme is immeasurably well received and respected by all who benefit from it. Several people attended a reception to tell us how it needed to be boosted. They spoke with great enthusiasm about the aid programme and told us about the politics of the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Organisation. As a result, we have a political contact with the black population of South Africa which will prove invaluable in building up the confidence of the whole population in southern Africa and re-establishing proper trade, social and cultural relationships with it.

I should like to see that quality of aid extended to our whole aid programme. We have a problem, in that we have always been wary of being called neo-colonialists. Government aid programmes are rigidly Government to Government. The administration of both British programmes and European development fund programmes run by the directorate general VIII needs to be more flexible. Programmes are dominated far too much by what the host Government believe should be done and too little by what we regard as the priorities in that country. Particularly when we are dealing with Governments which have failed, are corrupt or have "inappropriate economic policies"—in the jargon of the aid programmes—the wisdom of continuing to support such programmes is questionable.

For example, in Zambia we support the education programme, when the Government themselves are not prepared to put money into it. The result is that the whole education programme is spiralling downwards into an unacceptable quality. If the Zambian Government refuse to put their money in but demand that we put our money in, we should say no. We must tell them that they must put their money in. We want to help but we cannot do so if they refuse to put money in and use it instead to build huge party headquarters or headquarters for the Government copper company, while denying it adequate money for investment to enable it to compete with other copper-producing countries worldwide.

We cannot and should not tolerate that kind of distortion. We must rethink our aid programmes so that they are well directed to the poorest people and have aid objectives with which we agree. Obviously, they must be agreed with the host country too, but they should deal with matters about which we are enthusiastic, and they should go in the direction that we think is right.

That requires stopping the administration of the aid programme as it is done at present. The three-year rolling programme is pre-set and inflexible. Each country gets a little bit. A country received so much previously, so it gets the same sum this year, plus a little extra for inflation. That aid framework programme must be revised. We must be able to respond more easily not only to immediate problems, such as hurricanes and famines, but to the changing picture within those countries and our perception of them.

The aid programme must be strongly connected to private enterprise and investment. When private investors go to the aid programme administrator, they must not hear, "Our money is wholly committed for three years. We do not have any. Go away and find somebody else to help with your project." In the past two months, when I was in Southern Africa, I was told that the private sector had nothing to do with the programme of the Overseas Development Administration. That attitude must change.

I am delighted that we are beginning to change the attitude between the ODA and the Commonwealth Development Corporation. As hon. Members will see from publications, when the ODA is asked what the private programme is, it says that it has the CDC. Indeed, it has, and the CDC does excellent work. However, there is competition between the ODA and the CDC for funds from the aid budget. As a result, instead of boosting and developing CDC-ODA programmes, the CDC is starved

of the money necessary to do the work. The sum needs to be doubled or trebled. I am surprised that a Government who are as devoted as I am to private enterprise as the engine of growth in third-world countries have not done more.

I am delighted that CDC and ODA representatives are now meeting and beginning to plan joint projects. For example, one would normally expect a forestry project to have roads, telephone systems, electricity and so on. ODA grant money is needed to provide the electricity, housing, roads and infrastructure, and CDC investment is needed for a properly conducted timber project which does not destroy but harvests the forests, and which continues to encourage its redevelopment. I hope that we shall see much more of that sort of combined project, which has just begun.

We must ask the ODA to think about its programmes in relation to private investment. It is only the resumption of private investment which will address the poverty problems. It is only with private investment and private initiative on the part of the inhabitants of the host country and with inward investment from abroad that we shall begin to see the economic development which is vital, if those countries are to recover any economic prosperity and to provide schools, education and health care for women and children. In that way, they can begin to help themselves, which is an objective stated in the ODA's report.

It is vital to get the politics right. In his speech in June to the all-party group on overseas development and the Overseas Development Institute, the Foreign Secretary set a new tone when he said that we cannot go on lending to countries with Governments who are not accountable to the people, where the rule of law does not apply, where there is no freedom of the press and where we are confronted with trade barriers. Those countries must lower their barriers to allow trade, just as we must under the general agreement on tariffs and trade, which we failed to do in December, but which I hope we will succeed in doing in January.

Restrictions on trade, for example in textiles, are incredibly damaging to the ability of those countries to recover and to begin to earn their own living. We must lower our barriers, so that we in turn can ask them to lower their barriers to allow trade to flow, develop and grow. Failure to do so will plunge us into a 1930s-1940s depression. People will not be able to trade with each other and we shall not be able to get the growth which is vital if we are to have any chance of dealing with the increased population, which my right hon. Friend outlined so ably to us.

Although our aid programme is not sufficient and although we may need to adjust its direction and emphasis, it is a most valuable contribution to many countries throughout the world. We should be proud of the increase in real value terms. Let us encourage the Government to increase it further. Let us encourage the Government and the Opposition to be constructive, so that we can be proud of what our country is doing.

11.46 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) in these debates. I have always regarded him as one of a small minority of Conservative Members who speak with great knowledge and genuine concern on this subject. In particular, I agree with him about the excellent programme organised by our embassy in South Africa which I have seen. He will agree that some of the structural lessons from it do not apply to conditions other than those in South Africa. Would that they did. However, he is right that there are some lessons to be learnt from the effective nature of that modest but invaluable programme.

Before I turn to the main subject of today's debate, I wish to pick up what the Minister said about the famine in the Horn. There is a sense of public disquiet, nay outrage, that four or five years after the great emotional public response to the famine in Ethiopia, we should again ask people to dip into their pockets. It is not that they are reluctant to do so again, but they are asking what we have done since that great appeal to put right the situation in that and other parts of Africa. I have two suggestions to make to the Government.

First, as the Minister said, civil war exacerbates conditions of famine. That is true not just of Ethiopia, but of Mozambique, Angola and other countries. Those wars would not continue if we could starve the countries of their supply of arms. Now that we have a politically more effective United Nations organisation, it is time to revive the proposal of Hans Dietrich Genscher, the German Foreign Minister, for a United Nations-organised, international arms sales register. We in the west cannot continue to allow our private companies to profit from massive arms sales to all parts of the world and then wring our hands when civil wars continue. I should like the Government as a matter of policy to take action in the United Nations to stop the supply of arms to those areas, so that resources that are wasted on armaments may be put to peaceful uses. The figures are appalling. In the past few years the Governments of developing countries have spent double on arms what they have spent on health and education. We cannot be surprised that tragedies such as that in Ethiopia continue year after year while some people profit from the arms trade. The Government should make that issue a priority in their mission in the United Nations.

I do not know of the experience of other hon. Members, but I am struck by the number of young people in our country who want to find an outlet for their idealism and energy through service in the third world. Although the Government support Voluntary Services Overseas, it is aiming to increase its volunteers to a modest 1,500 next year. We should return to the spirit that was prevalent in the mid-1960s in Britain and America. Then there was a great well of organised support and qualified young people to go out to help the third world. Such voluntary work is cost-effective. People are willing to increase knowledge about the growing of crops, and organise irrigation schemes, engineering works, water supplies, immunisation programmes and family planning programmes. We should do a great deal more to harness the desire of so many people to undertake such voluntary work. Official Government-to-Government programmes are welcome, but voluntary assistance has a great role to play.

This debate is welcome, despite its thin attendance. It is held against the continuing background of the disproportionate allocation of resources and population on the globe. One quarter of the world's population lives in the rich north and we enjoy four fifths of the world's income

[Sir David Steel]

—three quarters of the world's population lives in the poor south and they are saddled with just one fifth of the world's income.

The Minister gave us the now-familiar figures of projections for population growth. Since 1950 the population has doubled and it is forecast to double again by the middle of next century. The Minister will also be aware, however, of more authoritative and gloomy reports, and I am glad that the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) devoted his speech to that important topic. He quoted from the report of United Nations Fund for Population Activities, which said:

"The next 10 years will decide the shape of the 21st century. They may decide the future of the earth as a habitation for humans."

If we took those words seriously the Chamber would be full today as we tried to tackle the problem. Unfortunately, the global population explosion and its link to threats to the world environment is far more serious than our people and the general political debate appreciate.

We have already heard that the developing countries have enough problems providing for their current populations, let alone trying to tackle the problems caused by substantially increased ones. The environmental consequences of a failure to tackle the population explosion will result in problems relating to food, fuel, water and land supplies as poorer countries make a desperate attempt to provide for their unacceptably increasing populations.

This country has a responsibility to lead on population and environmental issues. Last year Britain hosted the conference that agreed to phase out all CFC emissions from the European Community by the end of this century. I was disappointed, however, that we did not back the German and Danish Governments who were pressing for earlier targets. We are a little complacent about the scale of the destruction of the ozone layer which we shall allow to continue through the next decade. The fact is that 80 per cent. of greenhouse gases originate in the developed countries and, therefore, the responsibility lies with us to make a greater effort to reduce those emissions.

Just as the new political muscle of the UN should be used to control arms sales, so we should beef up the United Nations Environment Programme to make it the appropriate body to administer an international global climate fund to monitor and enforce CO_2 reductions. It should co-ordinate the necessary international action to achieve that. For that to happen, however, UNEP must be given greater political and financial backing.

I do not want to make a long speech, but I must take issue with the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford who said that we should be proud of our aid budget. When I visit schools I discover that the one thing that is fixed in people's minds is that, many years ago, the UN agreed that we should aim to devote 0·7 per cent. of our gross national product to overseas aid. People may not know much about overseas development, but that target figure is firmly in their minds. During the lifetime of the Government, we have never reached that target. The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has called on the Government to set a timetable for achieving that target, but it has not materialised; nor have we had an acceptance of that target in principle.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have always accepted the target in principle. We cannot stipulate a timetable, but we shall work towards it as fast as we reasonably can, taking into account what all the other donors are doing.

Sir David Steel: I withdraw my claim that the Government have not accepted that target in principle, but such acceptance is no good if one looks at the facts. In 1979, when the Government came to office, we were spending 0·5 per cent. of GNP on overseas aid. We were still short of the target, but from then on our contribution went down and down. The lowest contribution to overseas aid came in 1987—after eight years of Conservative Government—when we contributed 0·28 per cent. of GNP to overseas aid. Our contribution has increased a bit since, but it is no good for the Government to say, "Oh, haven't we done a wonderful job of turning the economy round? We are such an effective Government." That means nothing when one considers the pathetic slide in our contributions to overseas aid.

I also understand that we are well below the average European Community contributions. The Minister referred to other donors; she should be aware that EC member states have set varying targets for achieving the 0·7 per cent. contribution. This year, the average contribution from the EC is 0·52 per cent. of GNP—well above our contribution.

I certainly would not say that we should be proud of our overseas aid budget. I hope that the Minister will not take offence, but I am trying to give her greater power in the counsels of the Government. For that reason, and not because of her sex, I wish that she had been admitted to the Cabinet in the recent reshuffle as she might have had even more leverage in getting a more generous contribution from the Treasury.

Mr. Wells: I appreciate the constructive way in which the right hon. Gentleman has approached the argument, but he would agree that it is fair to point out that the statistic based on GNP per head will vary if the GNP goes up quickly. As a result of that a country could be spending more money but spending less on trade and provision. In the interests of fairness it is also worth remembering that the British aid budget is the sixth largest in the world.

Sir David Steel: Yes, but the whole point of the original UN target was to link it to GNP so that as a nation's prosperity increased so did its contribution to the less fortunate. As we are, in relative terms, comfortably off and, as our standard of living has increased in the past decade, it is a shame that we have also watched our contribution to overseas aid decline.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The point of the GNP figure was to establish a base line. For example, Japan now gives more aid than any other country, although in GNP terms it is lower. Our problem is that we are giving less as a percentage of GNP than other countries which claim that their economies are worse off than ours, and we have had a booming economy for 10 years.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman is agreeing with my point.

I want, at the same time, to compliment the Government, and I can do that by agreeing with what the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford said about debt. The Government's record on official debt has been good.

The decision to write off £16 billion for 22 or 23 countries has been generous and imaginative, and they are to be congratulated on it.

I now ask the Minister to go further by bringing pressure to bear on the private sector banks. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford spoke about institutional lending, and I agreed with him. But there is also a great deal of bank debt owed to this and other countries. The banks lent on an irresponsible scale at a time when interest rates were lower than they are now. Many countries which borrowed are in great difficulty now because of the increase in world interest rates and the lack of success of their economies.

Whereas a few years ago when one made this type of suggestion the banks wrung their hands and said, "We must be careful not to set off a banking crisis," they have since set aside, and organised their structural internal funds to cope with, bad debts. Instead of allowing those funds to lie fallow, waiting for bad debts to happen, the Government should, in a dialogue with the banks, urge them to follow the Government's example and write off some of the longstanding debts of the poorest countries.

We have seen a few welcome changes of attitude from the Government since the change of Prime Minister. We note the decision, for example, on compensation to haemophiliacs. There is another change of attitude which I hope the new Prime Minister will introduce, and that is to reverse the disastrous and hasty decision that was made when the Conservatives took office in 1979 to charge increased fees for overseas students. Not only was that policy short-sighted from the point of view of the needs of the developing world, but it was lamentably short-sighted from the point of view of Britain's national interest and influence in the world.

It would not be costly to reverse that decision. I urge the Minister to get back at the Treasury and, in particular, to bite hard on the ear of the new Prime Minister and say, "Here is another gesture which would make a big difference to Britain's standing in the world at relatively little cost." I urge her to take that action.

12.2 pm

Mr. George Gardiner (Reigate): I join in the congratulations that have been extended to my right hon. Friend the Minister on her comprehensive speech in introducing the debate and for the diligence that she brings to her office.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) made some disparaging comments about a speech by the Foreign Secretary last June to the Overseas Development Institute in London. I wish at the outset to acknowledge the significant contribution that that speech made to thinking on this subject. To many of us, it came like a fresh breeze across many of the stale old arguments on overseas development aid that we have heard over the years. Indeed, I was glad to detect gusts of that fresh breeze in the Minister's speech today.

The speech of the Foreign Secretary was given under the title, "Prospects for Africa in the 1990s", and it is on the experience of sub-Saharan Africa that I shall dwell today. The countries of that region, many of them Commonwealth countries, have been recipients of heavy British development aid, yet any observation must lead to the conclusion that all that aid has done almost nothing to elevate the economic condition of the ordinary people in those countries. Indeed, often the reverse has been the case.

In the last 20 years, the real per capita income in many sub-Saharan African states has actually dropped. For example, 10 per cent. of Tanzania's entire GNP is made up of overseas aid, yet its economic condition continues to deteriorate.

What has gone wrong? Why has all our development aid over the years not had its intended effect? Could it be that we are supplying it in the wrong way? In his speech to the Overseas Development Institute, the Foreign Secretary drew some comparisons between the experience over the last 30 years of countries in sub-Saharan Africa and many in south-east Asia around the Pacific rim. Many of the countries in both regions, he said, were once ruled by colonial powers. Both had had the advantages and disadvantages of that experience. Many in south-east Asia have fewer natural resources than countries in Africa, yet over those decades the standard of living of those Pacific rim countries has leapt ahead, while in sub-Saharan Africa it has stagnated.

The Foreign Secretary was careful about drawing easy comparisons, yet he put his finger on the essential difference. By and large, those Pacific rim countries have had good government and, just as important, an open economic system developing free market economies. On the other hand, too many in Africa have suffered from bad government, often in dictatorial one-party states, with highly interventionist and collectivist economies.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley was selective in quoting from the Foreign Secretary's speech. My right hon. Friend also said:

> "Economic success depends to a very large extent on effective and honest government, political pluralism and, I would add, observance of the rule of law, freer and more open economies. These are choices for Africans, not for us to make. But aid donors can help where the will is there by providing assistance and training to strengthen legal, financial and other institutions which help form the fabric of a healthy society."

Today, the Minister gave examples of that.

The Foreign Secretary continued:

> "And they should consider potential recipients of aid in the light of certain criteria. Countries which tend towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights, market principles, should be encouraged. Governments which persist with repressive policies, corrupt management, wasteful discredited economic systems should not expect us to support their folly with scarce aid resources which could be used better elsewhere."

He went on to point out that those were precisely the tests that we were now applying in eastern Europe. I believe that that approach should be made a watershed in British development aid policy.

That gives rise to some interesting lines of thought, many of which were developed in a stimulating report issued last month by the United Kingdom branch of the International Freedom Foundation under the title: "Recommendations for the Future Conduct of British Government Aid and Development Policy." I will not ask the Minister today to comment on the report's proposal that the Overseas Development Administration should be disbanded and replaced by a new overseas enterprise agency within the Department of Trade and Industry. I have a sneaking feeling that she would not agree with that suggestion. That is an idea worth pursuing, although perhaps not in the context of the debate.

[Mr. George Gardiner]

I have a couple of thoughts that I shall develop in the light of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's analysis. The first is perfectly summarised in the report of the International freedom Foundation:

"Traditional aid policy has served to reinforce the dirigiste, highly interventionist, economic policies of many Third World states and has not contributed to the political liberalisation of these societies. By failing to tie the continuation of aid to massive economic and political restructuring, western governments have, in effect, rewarded the pursuit of authoritarian administration in the underdeveloped world. The undemocratic regimes of countries such as Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, the Seychelles and elsewhere have been given no incentive to change their ways."

That is certainly borne out by my own observations in Zambia, which has not only a one-party constitution, with all the stagnation and wasted talent that goes with it, but an economic system dominated by parastatal organisations, with all their managerial posts entirely within the patronage of the central party organisation. It is small wonder that Zambia has a basket-case economy, with many elements distressingly similar to those experienced within the Soviet Union today.

However much development aid one tips in at the top, it will all be frittered away long before it serves to raise the living standards of ordinary people at the bottom. For years, the excuse has been made of the apartheid regime next door and the armed struggle waged by the African National Congress. But that will not wash any more. The fault for Zambia's economic stagnation lies fair and square within its own political and economic structure.

But at last the light is dawning. Zambians have been promised multi-party elections next year. We welcome that, although we wait to see how fair and free they will be. I submit that all sub-Saharan African countries must be told that, unless pluralistic political systems are instituted and the market system encouraged, they can expect development aid to tail off. What goes for eastern Europe must go for southern Africa too.

The second thought prompted by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is that we should look again at the practice of pouring so much development aid in at the top of the still collectivist economies. Instead, we should direct more to the bottom and help individuals and families in the third-world countries to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. That would mean not going for ambitious infrastructure schemes, although they are often important, but giving individuals the basics to improve their own economic conditions and serve as points of growth in their economies at the grass roots. That policy is the very reverse of collectivism, but experience suggests that it would have a far more potent effect.

The ODA has experience of such a system in several parts of the world, as we heard earlier in the debate. I have seen it at work in South Africa—in the squatter camps around Cape Town, where groups of women have been given sewing machines to develop their own dressmaking businesses. Machines to make wire fencing or building bricks have been given to small co-operatives, which in turn have spawned other small industries around them. Tools have been given to make furniture and sheds to serve as factories. It is from such acorns that third-world economies can grow, but to do so they must have a free, non-collectivist economic environment.

I welcome the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister today about the need to involve local people. Often good development policies require direct contact with such people. We should not always rely on what are often inefficient Government agencies in some of the third-world countries.

Many more thoughts flow from the speech of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last June. We can only hope that the logic of his diagnosis will be followed through in the Government's future aid policies.

12.15 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): We should check what could be described as the looseness with which we use language when discussing policies. When I reflect on the title of the debate, which refers to

"progress in assisting economic reform . . . in the developing world",

I challenge the word "progress". Evidence suggests that there has not been much. I also challenge, somewhat controversially, the phrase "developing world". Signs seem to suggest that some countries are developing rapidly, while others are going downhill.

Another phrase that should not be lightly slid over, is "economic reform", which can mean many different things in different contexts. Even within this Government's lifetime the instruments of economic reform change and take on different characters and contents.

This year the World bank produced the "World Development Report 1990", its 13th annual report on world development indicators. What was striking about it was the word "poverty" haunting the cover. It was exactly the same word as haunted the cover of the 1980 report. The 1990 report states:

"The world economy enjoyed moderate growth in the closing year of the decade. But the auspicious picture was not uniform. The industrial countries saw favourable developments in growth, trade and investment. Real per capita incomes grew (and poverty declined) in South Asia and, even more markedly, in East Asia. But in some countries of Latin America and in most of sub-Saharan Africa, real per capita incomes, living standards, and investment have slipped. For the poor in these countries, the 1980s was a lost decade."

The report goes on to spell out that the number of poor people will increase in the years to come, given the present signs of world development.

A similar report was published by the International Labour Office in 1987. It said:

"The world labour situation has deteriorated further since the first two volumes of the World Labour Report were published in 1984 and 1985. Real incomes from work, the principal source of income for most households, have fallen in many countries. The great majority of workers in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, both wage workers and the self-employed, have suffered a drop in real income of as much as 30 to 40 per cent. or more since the beginning of the 1980s."

It seems that all the analyses show that people have been getting poorer in the past decade. In recent months we have heard estimates of between 5 million and 10 million people facing starvation in the Sudan and Ethiopia. Only yesterday, we heard that as a result of crop failure in Eritrea and parts of Tigray, 6 million people could face widespread disaster.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation report states:

"With reserve stocks virtually depleted after last year's poor harvest in Eritrea and Tigray, widespread loss of life is inevitable unless further emergency relief and logistic support for its distribution are mobilised."

It is absolutely plain that the international position has been getting demonstrably worse in terms not only of emergency relief and aid, but of the relationship between trade and development. The spiral of world economy is working against, not in favour of, the poor countries.

What is Britain's response? Sadly, I suspect that our reponse to the latest statements of the projected famine in Africa will be that people will wait for the pictures of famine camps to appear on television again. Perhaps we become anaesthetised by television pictures. It is as though we leave to information technology and the mysteries of satellites the ability to make the only connections. We can see what is happening in our front rooms but we are reduced to passive spectators—almost voyeurs of what is happening on the world scene. Our emotions are challenged, but we do not believe that we need to work through our interdependence or to think about the causes of world hunger and poverty. It is as though we are being reduced to passive subjects and if we are subjected to too much we switch it off and hope that the poor will go away.

The result is a lack of analysis of the complex nexus of relations that the modern economy weaves around the world. There is a lack of awareness that small actions and decisions that we make, when compounded, have consequences for millions of other people throughout the world, who suffer or celebrate as a result of what we do.

I have been reminded of a letter written and signed by young people in Latin America:

"The crops in Argentina, the American embargo of wheat to the USSR, the European Common Market, the crop surplus in France, and hunger in India are all part of the same web. A transistor radio made in Korea, which I buy here at a low price, involves the low salary of the workers, the repressive regime in Korea, Japanese economic policies, American capital . . . unemployment in my own country, and problems which will involve my children and grandchildren."

That is why I suggest that aid and trade and activities in other areas of economic policy and commerce must be related to each other when assessing the Government's aid programme.

We are also experiencing a new environmental awareness in an interdependent world. The Minister said that environmental problems know no boundaries, but rather than facing up to the shared responsibilities that we should adopt to the environment, there are some who assume that they should take over those responsibilities. There are even people abroad who claim that the Amazon rain forest belongs to them, and there are others who put the unequal restraints on pollution across boundaries to their own commercial advantage.

I offer an example of this from my constituency. In Armley in Leeds people are dying of a deadly disease known as mesothelioma because they worked in a factory that produced asbestos. When they went home dust was blown out of the factory at night and lay like snow on the streets and on school playgrounds. So people in the neighbourhood contracted the disease. The factory closed in 1956, but years later people are still dying.

After the factory closed in Leeds it was transferred, lock, stock and barrel, to India, where it opened again without the same restrictions and continued to pollute beyond the reach of the controls implemented here. The irony is that some of the families that I represent in Leeds have relatives in India who will go through the same suffering and death as their relations in Armley. This is a classic example of exporting pollution and of economic injustice on an international scale, using boundaries to commercial advantage instead of tackling environmental problems as shared responsibilities.

Just as our neighbours are nearer to us than we sometimes like to think, so the causes of international injustice are nearer than we are preapred to face up to. I remember the Band Aid concert in 1985. Late that night a promoter was asked what he thought of the money that had been coming in. People had been ringing in with donations all night, and he said that there had been an excellent response but that we needed to shift away from private charity and start demanding public justice. We need to move from private compassion to questioning international economic, commercial and political structures. We need to replace emergency relief work with genuine development work.

Many of the young people who took part in Band Aid are now surprised to hear that famine is again threatening in Ethiopia and the Sudan. They really believed that they had solved the problem. The title of this debate suggests progress, but the evidence shows that little progress can be reported back to these young people.

During the whole of the past decade official Government policy has been to reduce the aid budget. Official development assistance is down 24 per cent. since 1979, when it was £2,091,000, Today the figure is £1,579,000. Aid programmes for developing countries were cut by 15 per cent. between 1979 and 1989. Gross public expenditure on overseas aid has fallen by 7 per cent. in the same period. At the same time as challenging this reduction, we must insist that the Government acknowledge the crucial role of trade. I remember a cartoon produced in Mexico which showed a huge man handling a Mexican peasant. He held out a teaspoon in one hand. In the teaspoon was a little pile labelled "Aid". But the other hand was holding the peasant by the throat and on the huge man's arm was enblazened the word "Trade". So, as the teaspoon of aid is offered the trade structures are strangling its recipient.

An example from our corner of the world is the fact that the trade share of developing countries with the EEC has dropped. Their exports to the Community have fallen by 10 per cent. since 1984. That is why the GATT talks are so crucial. If there is only one economic model, as suggested by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner), it seems to have come up against ultimate breakdown—the deadlock that is holding up the talks. As the world moves towards new bloc politics, with President Bush suggesting in south America recently that north and south America could form a trading block as a bulwark against the EEC linking up with eastern Europe, we could end up with a world divided between the Americas, Europe and the Pacific rim countries. Then there would be a danger of the three major blocs squeezing out two thirds of the developing world. We must work to facilitate the genuine incorporation of developing countries in the multilateral trade system. Systems such as general system of preferences must be made more effective for developing countries.

We also need a wider internationalist vision in politics and economic decision-making in Britain. It is necessary in our trade, aid, cultural exchanges and diplomatic relations.

For years the non-governmental organisations have led the way and have had insufficient Government backing. The Minister spoke about Government aid supporting

[Mr. John Battle]

those who are committed to better government. I hope she does not mean that we should impose a single political and economic outlook on other countries. We should not say, as has been said, that there is no alternative to the market economy. Some people in America suggest that recent developments have changed history. I hope that in their arrogance the Government will not suggest to the rest of the world that economic history as we know it has come to an end and that there is only one model for the economy.

Mrs. Chalker: It is important to correct the hon. Gentleman on two matters. I have never said, and the Government will never say, that only one model of government or economic reform should be imposed on any developing country. Economic reform should be sustainable. It should attract investment and encourage countries to spend within their limits. In my winding-up speech I shall deal with the matters raised by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) spoke about non-governmental organisations. I am frequently accused of speaking too much about those organisations, so I shall be brief. In 1989-90 we spent more than £65 million with the voluntary sector on the work that it carried out. I am totally devoted to the joint funding scheme and my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) spoke about the good work of the NGOs. We have more than quadrupled their funding over the past five years and I shall again increase the contribution this year.

Mr. Battle: I have never had such a long intervention from a Minister and I take it as a compliment. I accept that the Government support NGOs. I hope that the policy implications of the work of some NGOs and their comments will be borne in mind by the Government.

Although the Minister did not refer to the single model economy, the hon. Member for Reigate certainly spoke about it. The Minister spoke about spending within limits. I hope that the Government will not define those limits for other countries or set parameters. It is not only our Government who support the single economic model; the policy is beginning to infect other countries.

The European Community recently published guidelines for co-operation with developing countries in Latin America and Asia. It was published on 19 June in Brussels and contains this interesting passage:

"Economic co-operation consists, essentially, of activities aimed at establishing a 'common language' with our partners in the fields of technology and economics."

We should not start from a common language but should seek a common understanding based on mutual respect. We should not seek to promote a single discourse based on the free market model but should move in the direction of respecting different cultural and economic traditions and languages. Such respect leaves space for the development of economic and political imagination elsewhere. There is no such thing as the best single economy. The debate is the starting point for the issues that I have raised. To ensure that the policies adopted by the Minister's Department are for the benefit of the world's poor, the debate needs to continue in the formulation of Government policy.

The real challenge of the 1980s is to work towards a new world order with the practical objective of eliminating poverty at its core. The best way to tackle poverty is to promote the long-term development of the poor because that will reduce their vulnerability to emergencies and natural disasters. Some good project work is being carried out and there has been some late-in-the-day response to the need for emergency relief. However, that is a piecemeal approach. Tackling poverty should be at the heart of a positive and integrated policy that addresses the links between trade and industry, the environment and poverty. Such a policy should be backed by real budget commitments.

The integrated policy response that I have outlined is sadly lacking. British overseas trade and commerce from arms sales to tied-aid contracts are undermining an effective aid programme. The Minister may think that the export drives by the Ministry of Defence have nothing to do with the aid programme. I hope she will at least admit that they can undermine it by absorbing resources that are needed elsewhere.

While the Government use their newly discovered language of compassion, they lack the international vision to realise that the world needs to look forward to the 21st century. Late-in-the-day, piecemeal projects cannot be a substitute for positive international strategies that address the workings of what we must all acknowledge is a global economy. Tackling structural injustice on that scale must be done on the basis of co-operation and mutual respect. That will be the task for the new Labour Government of the 1990s.

12.34 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Before I concentrate on my main theme, the Palestinian refugees, I shall say something about the crisis of food shortages in the Soviet Union, especially in the major cities. As the House will know, this is one of the many issues for debate at the Rome summit that is taking place this week. It is strange that the Soviet Union should be facing such a food crisis, as this year it has enjoyed a record harvest. As we know, one of the principal problems is that there is a failure in the organisation, transportation and distribution of that food from the points of production to the shops in the cities. I believe that some 20 to 30 per cent. of all the food that is harvested in the Soviet Union fails to get to the shops; it remains rotting in the fields and by the roadside. A lot more is hijacked by the Red Army, the KGB and the various Mafia-style organisations that are becoming more prolific in the cities.

The worry is that the same may happen to the food aid to be donated by the international community and the voluntary organisations. Earlier this week, a small delegation representing three religious-based voluntary organisations—the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry, the Jubilee Campaign and the Movement for Christian Democracy—led by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) met Mr. Zamyatin, the Soviet Ambassador in London, to discuss how food aid and other humanitarian donations being raised by such organisations will be able to reach those for whom it is being donated.

According to Alexander Ornorodnikov, chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, which is organising the distribution of this voluntary aid in Moscow, among the people for whom it is organised and to whom it will be distributed are those who are so elderly and frail that they simply cannot stand in the inevitable queues in the food

shops. Such elderly people have been found dead in their flats because they dare not risk their health standing in those queues.

There are also an estimated 600,000 refugees in the Russian Republic, about 65,000 of whom are in Moscow. Over 200 of them are living in tents outside a hotel near Red square. Many have fled from the Islamic republics. Alexander Ognorodnikov has a list of 800 families in urgent need and on a priority list for help.

There are 1,000 orphans in two orphanages in Moscow to whom this food will be personally distributed. There are 1,000 known disabled people on the list of those who are potentially unable to help themselves and who are consequently victims of the food crisis, but who will be helped in this way. There are categorised poor families, the elderly, the sick, the widows, one-parent families and the housebound, who will be helped through the Christian Democratic Union in the Soviet Union.

According to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, the ambassador's response was positive. He has promised that an Aeroflot flight will be made available every week to transfer to the Soviet Union whatever food and humanitarian aid is raised in this country. However, we must remain concerned about ensuring that that aid will reach the people for whom it is being donated. That also applies to whatever international aid is agreed at the Rome summit. I look forward to my right hon. Friend's response to those points.

I hope that, at Rome, we will insist that the Soviet Union continues to implement its commitment to economic and political reforms, such as private ownership, the market economy, and a pluralistic society. That will do much to ensure that food shortages, like the communism that has caused them, will be confined to the dustbins of history.

As the House knows, one of the most depressed areas in the world for economy, jobs, and quality of life is Palestine. Since the armistice of 1949, Palestine has received billions of dollars of aid through the United Nations and through direct donations to sustain the refugees who were displaced by the Israeli war of independence, many of whom have experienced subsequent displacement because of further conflicts. I referred to their position in some detail during a summer Adjournment debate on 29 July 1988, following a visit to the area to prepare a report for the Council of Europe. Last month, I followed in my own footsteps to prepare a new report, which I want to share with the House today.

I hope that the House will agree that, after 42 years, it is an international scandal that 2·4 million registered refugees continue to be stateless and displaced. We all know why—it is the continued failure of Israel and its Arab neighbours to make a peace settlement possible. I shall refer to that again during my concluding remarks.

It is frequently suggested that it suits both sides to have so many Palestinians in the temporary conditions of camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the west bank of Gaza. Of course, the original communities of tents and shacks for those who fled in 1948 have since been replaced by more permanent structures. All 61 camps enjoy infrastructures to varying degrees, such as the provision of education, health services, a sense of community, and special help for hardship families. However, that is due only to the commendable work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—UNRWA—in the near east and other international agencies.

This year, the United Kingdom donated £5·64 million to UNRWA for direct aid, and £56 million has been donated since 1979. That is money well spent. Despite the frequent frustrations and the crises in the provision of adequate resources to match the basic needs of refugees, UNRWA is probably achieving the most cost-effective service possible under the circumstances. It compares extremely well with all the other humanitarian services provided by the United Nations. It is my view that no donor nation could have cause to complain that its money was being misspent.

Of particular importance, but consistently overlooked, is the valuable contribution that UNRWA makes to the political stability of the region, where such stability is conspicuously fragile. Without UNRWA there would undoubtedly be more confrontation, casualties, and hardship in Lebanon, Jordan and the occupied territories.

Equally overlooked is Israel's attempt through its defence force, which has acted as the civil administration since 1967, to resettle permanently the refugees in the Gaza strip in neighbourhood communities having a proper infrastructure and municipal services. Although more than 80,000 refugees—some 12,000 families—have been rehoused in that way, most refuse, having been encouraged by the United Nations to believe that it would prejudice their rights pending the outcome of a permanent solution to their situation. It would be surprising if Israel did not now decide that it had other housing priorities to fund.

When I visited the west bank and Gaza in March 1988, the intifada was three months old. It is now three years old, and there is no sign of it coming to an end, despite 858 Palestinians killed, 30,000 injured, 10,000 imprisoned, and 58 deported. Not one of the Palestinians to whom I spoke held out any expectation that that form of demonstration and unarmed resistance against continued Israeli occupation would cease, unless there was real hope of progress to self-determination.

Three years of violence, curfews, strikes and destructive retaliation by the Israeli defence forces have reduced once attractive biblical towns to war-torn communities where squalor and graffiti are rife. Schools are closed so regularly that it is impossible to provide proper education. Municipal services are breaking down, as is the infrastructure—including roads and drainage—and there is disruption of the provision of medical services.

The physical and psychological effect of that on the people has been devastating. They no longer live, but exist. There can be no quality of life under such conditions, and a whole generation of young people have lost their childhood because they are influenced no longer by their elders or the notables of their Arab communities, but by more shadowy factions both within and without—and they are then eager to act as fodder for the visible resistance.

Since making recommendations in 1988, there have been some notable increases in the contributions to UNRWA's budget—in particular, from the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Italy. The United Kingdom's contribution has increased by some 15 per cent. over the past two years. The recent encouraging trend towards peace in Lebanon has resulted in the return of UNRWA's field office in Beirut, and it may yet pave the way for the return of the organisation's head office from Vienna. Thanks to the Llewelyn-Davies feasibility study into UNRWA's organisation—funded by my right hon. Friend's Department, for which we are most grateful to

[Mr. David Atkinson]

her—a more effective performance is likely to emerge, although as that report stesses, a long-term commitment to capital expenditure will be required if its recommendations are to be completely successful.

I commend my right hon. Friend and her Department also for the grant and loan aids that they are giving to projects designed to discourage dependency and to encourage responsibility, enterprise, and income generation. My right hon. Friend is in regular contact with a number of non-governmental organisations, particularly Co-operation for Development. I was particularly impressed on my visits to two such projects. One was a television aerial manufacturer near Ramallah, who is now successfully selling his products to the Israeli market, and the other was a dental surgery in Nablus.

Palestinians are extremely entrepreneurial and will quickly produce a return on investment, and create new prosperity and jobs, if they are allowed to do so. It is to be regretted that, far from encouraging the establishment of such an economic base in its occupied territories, Israel actively discourages Palestinian enterprise in many ways, as I detailed in my report to the Council of Europe.

There have been two new developments of great significance for the situation of the Palestinian refugees since my 1988 report. The first is the effect of the Gulf crisis. For decades, refugee families have relied on incomes sent back to them by tens of thousands of Palestinians who have found work in Kuwait and other oil-producing countries—it has been estimated that between $130 million and £150 million is remitted to their families every year. But because of the crisis, that has ceased and Palestinians are returning home jobless. Not only is that resulting in an immediate end to such income, and a consequent increase in hardship cases for UNRWA to deal with; it has also added to unemployment and thus to instability in Jordan and the occupied territories.

In September, the commissioner general of UNRWA issued a special appeal to major donors for immediate and generous assistance to overcome the shortfall in funding the emergency related programme. I look forward to learning from my right hon. Friend this afternoon of the Government's response to the commissioner general's appeal. The second new development, which has far more serious long-term consequences for the region, is the recent, current and anticipated influx of so many Soviet Jews into Israel. Following the opening of the floodgates in October 1989, 120,000 have arrived in the first year, and the Jewish Agency, with which I had meetings—I also visited an absorption centre for Soviet Jews—expects that more than 3 million Soviet Jews will come in the foreseeable future. It is possible that the figure will be higher, as there are 11 million Jewish people living in the Soviet Union. Therefore it is understandable that Palestinian refugees fear that such an influx will prove to be at their expense in terms of jobs, housing and the resources that Israel currently makes available in the occupied territories.

In discussions that I had with four Israeli Ministers —it was my privilege to meet four Ministers in one day —including Mr. Sharon, the Housing Minister, it was suggested that there were no grounds for such fears, and that, in any case, Israel has assured the United States of America, as its major donor, that there will be no settlement of Soviet Jews in what is termed Judaea and Sumaria—the west bank.

I fear that I have found clear evidence that Soviet Jews are settling beyond the green line in east Jerusalem, and on the west bank. It must be obvious that, with the enormous numbers to come, a great deal many more will do so. Labour-intensive Palestinian refugee jobs will also be lost to Soviet Jews, not least because of the frequent imposition of night curfews, which prevent Palestinians from commuting daily into Israel to those jobs.

The aim of my report to the Council of Europe is humanitarian. It is not to recommend political solutions which will result in a just resolution of the refugee problem. Last Tuesday's debate on the Gulf crisis demonstrated once again that, even though there must be no linkage with that peaceful withdrawal from Kuwait which the entire world is urging on Iraq, the opportunity provided by such an outcome should be used to resolve other outstanding problems in the region. They include a resolution of the Kurdish problem, to which the entire world has turned a blind eye during the past 50 years and which will not go away. I see the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) in his place. He has championed the Kurdish cause for many years.

I was reminded of that cause by the reply by my right hon. Friend the Minister to my question which was published yesterday. I asked

"how much aid Her Majesty's Government have provided to Kurdish refugees for each year since 1979".

My right hon. Friend replied:

"two grants totalling £550,000 to assist Iraqi Kurds in Turkey and ethnic Turkish refugees from Bulgaria."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1990; Vol. 182, c. 480.]

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Mr. Atkinson: I see that the hon. Gentleman wants to catch my eye. I suspect that I am anticipating what he wants to tell me, but I gladly give way to him.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his reference to me. I very much agree with what he said. Is he aware that some of the 30,000 Kurdish people who fled from Iraq to Turkey in 1988 are still living in three camps in Turkey? They are not recognised as refugees by the Turkish Government. So far as I am aware, none of the aid which has been allocated has got through to the camps—it has been blocked by the Turkish Government. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is scandalous. Does he agree that the instability in the region is caused partly by the Palestinian issue and partly by the long-term issue of the rights of Kurdish people in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria? Until that problem is resolved, there will be no peace in the region.

Mr. Atkinson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he says. I shall pursue this matter further in the opportunity which is provided on Tuesday 29 January, when the Council of Europe is to debate a report and will inquire into precisely what has happened to the Kurdish refugees in Turkey and to the international aid which has been given to them.

We are talking about the Kurdish refugees from Iraq who are fleeing from the poison gas attacks of Saddam Hussein's air force in 1988, when 3,000 to 5,000 of them were killed. I have a moving account by a 19-year-old boy

who saw what happened when those gas bombs were dropped. I shall quote it, because it should be on the record:

"The bombs dropped and a green smoke arose. The people scratched their eyes, and then shook. They screamed out and then fell to the ground and shook again. Then they were still. We went down into the gorge and found a slime over their eyes and also running from their nose and mouth. The next day, men with goggles and gloves came and piled up the bodies. Some were still alive, but were piled on anyway, and then set on fire. There were screams coming from the burning bodies. They will be with me for the rest of my life."

That is Saddam Hussein. How right we are to show that man up for what he is.

The Kurdish people populate five countries—Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the Soviet Union. Their right to self-determination deserves recognition by the rest of the world, now and certainly when the Gulf crisis is over, or they will continue to be persecuted, continue to be refugees and continue to be tempted into terrorism—some are members of the PKK in Turkey.

Another outstanding problem in the region to be resolved, I hope, after the Gulf dispute is over is that of restoring sovereignty to Lebanon, with the withdrawal of all occupying forces from that country. But the principal outstanding issue to be resolved is the Palestinian problem.

I was encouraged during my discussions with both the Israelis and the Palestinians to find that there is a far narrower gulf between their views than I expected. Their views are defined in the Shamir peace plan produced 18 months ago and the Palestinian National Council declaration of November 1988. Each recognises the rights of the other, in the case of the PLO for the first time. Israel has always maintained that it does not want or need an international conference at which bilateral negotiations can take place such as those which succeeded in the case of Egypt at Camp David. But Israel stands condemned for the current stalemate.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister and to her colleagues in the Foreign Office that there is no reason why, now or following the resolution of the Gulf crisis, two simultaneous initiatives could not be urged on Israel and the Palestinians. Such initiatives could transform the climate and allow negotiations to commence. The first should be a requirement on Israel to commit itself to negotiate when the intifada has come to an end. The second should be a requirement on the Palestinians to bring the intifada to an end if Israel has made a commitment to negotiate. I have no doubt, that that strategy will be regarded as too simple by half, but I commend it to my right hon. Friend in the hope that it will resolve 42 years of displacement of 2·25 million Palestinian refugees.

1.1 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Even today's newspapers report that over 10 million people are at risk again in Ethiopia and Sudan from famine and starvation. That pinpoints the complexity and difficulty of resolving the problem that we face. We are continually beset by new short-term demands to meet the symptoms of the problem while at the same time we need to tackle the fundamental causes.

I recognise that the difficulty of Governments is not only the complexity but the scale and inter-relationship of the problems. Low food productivity, climatically induced famine, starvation and death, population growth, illiteracy and lack of birth control are all interrelated. The problem is knowing where to start and which problem should be given priority.

We must also recognise that events in the developing world are taking place too far away for many people in the industrial and developed world. They can dip into their pockets and feel good occasionally about helping with an individual problem, but the problems of Africa, Asia and south America do not impinge all that directly on their lives except by pricking their consciences occasionally.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, the problems of developing countries matter to everyone in a way of which we are only just beginning to become aware. She referred to the problem of global warming. The West is beginning to turn its political and social attention to that problem. If the world's population expands at the rate expected between now and 2025, the amount of carbon dioxide produced by mankind will double during that time. The amount has already trebled since 1950.

We are all aware that the forests are an important factor in the levels of carbon dioxide but it is not appreciated that the difference between the United Nations low-case projection of population growth and its medium-case projection is so great that if the higher projection is accurate, the extra carbon dioxide produced in the world will be the same amount as that which has resulted from deforestation.

We must face the reality that although humanitarian appeal has not led us to divert the resources necessary to deal with the problem, self-interest may well force Governments to do just that. It may be cheaper to deal with the problems than to deal with the consequences of ignoring them. The whole of mankind will pay, if helping the third world is not seen, as a matter not just of good works—I wish that that were sufficient appeal—but of good economic sense for the industrialised countries. It is also a matter of survival for the children of those who are making the decisions in those countries.

In her opening comments, the Minister said that Britain could not solve the problems alone and, indeed, we cannot. On the other hand, we can play our full part and, clearly, we are not doing that. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley showed the scale of the inadequacy of the help given by the British Government. Recently in another place in a debate on a similar subject, the Minister said that the Government accepted in principle the target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product laid down by the United Nations as the aid target from developed countries to the third world.

In 1987 and 1988 our contribution was way under half of that. In each of those years we gave more than £1·5 billion less than we would have done, had we conformed to the UN target. In the past five years we have not contributed between £8 billion and £9 billion because the Government have refused to meet the United Nations target, which they accept "in principle". If the Government can accept the target in principle, but only in principle, when we are oil-rich, what hope is there of the Government ever attaining it when our oil wealth diminishes or disappears? We are giving a smaller percentage of our GNP in aid than we did in 1979.

Too many pressures are pulling in the opposite direction. My hon. Friend referred to debt repayment.

[Mr. Alan Williams]

Limited state aid is being massively offset by the private exploitation of the very areas that we say we want to help. My hon. Friend dealt with the financial aspects of that.

One part of the third-world problem, as it is called, which stirs us most deeply, particularly at Christmas when we enter a period of overt sentimentality and high spending, is the pictures and prospect of children dying in third-world countries. We are fortunate in that only 11 children in 1,000 die in the first five years of life. In the poorest countries the figure is 20 and in Ethiopia it is more than 30.

Diarrhoeal diseases are the biggest killer of children worldwide.

Mrs. Chalker *indicated assent.*

Mr. Williams: The Minister nods her head in approval.

Mrs. Chalker: Not in approval.

Mr. Williams: Not in approval, but in agreement.

Of the 5 million children who die a year, a quarter die from diarrhoeal diseases. *The Lancet* says that the risk of dying from such diseases is 14 times greater for children who are bottle-fed, while UNICEF states that children who are bottle-fed are 25 times more likely to die from any illness than those who are fed natural milk. Far too many children are dying from diseases that are exacerbated by foodstuffs that substitute for natural milk.

The paradox is that while our Government are trying, albeit inadequately, to reduce infant mortality, western companies are contributing to it enormously. Nestlé, for example, provides free dried milk for hospitals. It does so to trap mothers on to a feeding regime despite the fact that the vast proportion of mothers in the developing countries are illiterate and are therefore unable to read or understand the instructions. Those countries' water supplies are also contaminated, so when mothers use that dried milk it adds to the likelihood of their children dying from illnesses. Such free dried milk is given despite the fact that natural lactation has a contraceptive value for the mother when breast feeding.

Recently a documentary was shown on Australian television entitled "The Formula Fix". The subject was Nestlé but that company has not dared to sue the television company. The programme concerned the code that relates to milk products. The world health authorities and UNICEF drew up that code in 1986, but the documentary revealed that, two years after that, it had evidence that Nestlé had deliberately tried to find its way around the code. In the Philippines the code relating to free milk had applied for two years, but the documentary recorded:

"Nestlé also implemented a scheme to circumvent the provision in the Code banning free supplies. Nestlé representatives asked hospital personnel to sign requests for supplies which are then delivered as a credit purchase to the hospital or clinic, with a tacit understanding that collection of payments will not be pursued. These 'sales' are then written off as uncollected debts or bad debts, and Nestlé not only escapes charges of giving away free supplies but also used the bad debts to reduce income taxes."

That is one way in which a major western company is peddling products that increase the likelihood of death among children in the third world. One may ask why that company gives free food to the hospitals and whether it is worth it. The charity, however, ends the moment the mother leaves hospital. When we realise how much it costs those families to sustain the supply of milk products, we begin to understand where Nestlés charity originates and why medical authorities say that it would be far better if the same money were spent on nourishing the mother rather than on buying those food products.

It takes 18 per cent. of the annual wage in Botswana to buy 40 kg of Nestlé's formula. For that money, the family could buy 62 kg of milk plus 36 kg of beef and 208 kg of sorghum. In Zimbabwe, 21 per cent. of the annual wage is spent on milk products. That is equivalent to 124 litres of sour milk plus 37 kg of beans and 207 kg of maize meal. The family is giving up that amount of nutrition to sustain the feed regime that Nestlé established in hospital. In Kenya the figure is as high as 47 per cent. of the annual wage.

Mr. Corbyn: A problem in Zimbabwe is not that the feed regime for babies is often imposed by Nestlé and its ilk, but that the soft drinks regime for the whole population is imposed by the Coca-Cola corporation. Hardly any fruit juices are available for children to drink, despite the nature of the country, which could be prolific in growing fruit.

Mr. Williams: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am citing one example to demonstrate the way in which companies in the west are working against the aid programmes of western Governments, paradoxically often with the support and subsidy of those same Governments. In other words, families in the third world who have so little are being expected to provide the dividends for the shareholders in the west who already have so much. As my hon. Friend says, it is the same with soft drinks and tobacco.

Consider the hypocrisy of the west. We in the EC have laid down targets for tobacco products, and products that do not meet the tar ceilings imposed by the Commission cannot be sold in the west. Instead, they are going to the third world. According to the World bank, 80 per cent. of the world's population will be in what we call third-world countries by the turn of the century. Confronted with concern about health and restrictions imposed in the west—especially in Europe, but particularly in the United States—the companies concerned are selling their products in the third world.

BAT Industries, our fifth-largest company, like its American competitors, is trying fiercely to build up its share of third-world markets. In Kenya, for example, BAT had sales of £50 million in 1985. By last year the figure had reached £89 million, an increase of 80 per cent., representing a 20 per cent. per year growth rate.

Even more evil and unforgiveable, we in the EC are shipping our high-tar, unacceptable tobacco output—the output is forming a tobacco mountain—to those countries. The European taxpayer is subsidising the companies involved to the tune of £740 million a year, which is half of what the British Government are giving in aid to the third world. The European Economic Community is paying half of the subsidy to the tobacco manufacturers to enable them to sell, in the third world, products that are banned in this country. The British taxpayer is paying £100 million a year of those subsidies, so British money is contributing to the build-up of that disgusting trade by the tobacco manufacturers.

I referred to the hypocrisy of the west, the EC and the Americans. The Americans have gathered their might in Iraq—I support our troops there—but America is taking on another deadly foe, Thailand, which was a threat to the American way of life because it had a ban on the import, the advertisement, point of sale promotion and general promotion, of tobacco products. Mighty America could not actually send in its aircraft carriers and air force, which was preoccupied, so it used a different sledgehammer—the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the threat of unilateral trade sanctions against Thailand. That is the scale of hypocrisy in America and this country.

The tobacco companies have enlisted the subsidies of the EC and the diplomatic power of the American Government to secure their markets. When America gains those markets, it gears its advertising to women who are deemed to be particularly vulnerable and to the young. In most of those countries, unlike in the west, there are no age limits on the sale of tobacco. Therefore, we are providing aid on a diminutive scale to appease the public conscience, while bleeding those countries commercially and risking destroying the health of their population simply for the financial benefit of a limited number of western shareholders.

I shall conclude with three brief quotations to demonstrate the problem that we face. The first is from *The Sunday Times* of 13 May. A BAT spokesman said:

"BAT's policy is very clear. Our view is that smoking has not been established to be the cause of disease."

The second quotation is from the firm handling the advertising, which states:

"Our view is that if you can buy something freely, the manufacturers should be able to advertise it."

The third quotation is from Britain's chief medical officer, Sir Donald Acheson who, when told of the situation, said:

"I fail to understand how anyone can bring themselves to continue to promote this deadly habit."

Such hypocrisy, disregard and contempt for human life typifies the commercial practice that is completely undermining and swamping the attempts of western Governments to help the problems of the third world. Since appeals to conscience and humanitarianism have failed, I only hope that when the west recognises the link between the problems of the third world and the crisis of global warming, it will do, in self-interest, what it failed to do out of charity and good will.

1.24 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham):

"Wouldn't you cut down a tree to cook your next meal if there was no other option?

The environment is a luxury; only those who have enough food already have the time to worry about it. You eat the chocolate biscuits—you people who have never seen a cocoa tree. We pick the cocoa beans—we people who have never tasted chocolate biscuits. You worry about the environment. We cut down trees.

I tell you: there is only one way to solve the threat to the environment. Poverty must be eliminated. How? You must have less. We must have more. You must not give of your surplus. You must sacrifice to give. You must not give out of pity or guilt. You must give out of love. We need your help. But we want to be treated like fellow children of God, not animals on whom you dump food. If you will listen, I will tell you how to do it".

Those words are by Bernard Guri, the co-ordinator of agriculture and development for the Catholic church in Ghana, as quoted in a book called "Bad Samaritans" by Paul Vallelly.

If we are to deal with the four elements of development —relief, development itself, justice and empowerment—we must start with various imperatives, which will not work for all of us at the same time but which are all relevant.

We live in a country that expects to double its standard of living twice in the lifetime of each person. In the past 10 years there have been changes in the level of aid. We hold slightly repetitive debates, in which Conservative Members say that the aid budget has increased and Opposition Members—and occasionally Conservative Members—claim that we have not met the 0·7 per cent. target. Changes in trade have taken away three or four times as much in foreign exchange earnings from developing countries as have the changes in the amount of aid.

At the Africa Centre a few days ago, when the book "Bad Samaritans" was discussed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) and by Dr. Charles Elliott, Dean of Trinity Hall, Cambridge and former director of Christian Aid, I asked how we might double or redouble our loving. Dr. Elliott suggested that it might be by increasing our vulnerability. One of the problems with our developed world is that we try to erect defences against any sort of risk. We put up military defences to stop countries being threatened or overrun. We try to create economic barriers so that no one from outside can threaten our jobs. Dr. Elliott was probably right to suggest that we need to share some of the experiences and risks of people in other countries.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) rightly said—I think that the Front-Bench speakers agreed with them—that we must try to ensure that the benefits of flexible political and economic processes are not only available to others but are advertised as essential to the idea of empowerment.

During the past 10 or 20 years more people have suffered because of wars between countries and within countries than have suffered from changes in trade. We should be proud that more countries in the past 10 or 15 years have chosen political systems in which the Government can be changed without resort to the bomb and the bullet or to exile. This has happened in the European Community—in Spain, Portugal and Greece. It has happened in some of the countries of Africa, and now it has happened in middle and eastern Europe and, although imperfectly, in central and south America. We must never forget that.

In 1978 the then Minister for Overseas Development acknowledged in response to a report by the Select Committee on Overseas Development that when renegotiating the Lomé convention it was important to recognise that aid would not work effectively in repressive or chaotic countries. In those days the prime example was Uganda, but there are other examples in the world today.

These sort of debates work best when we reduce the partisan element in them as much as possible. I sometimes get fed up with the idea that there was a golden world under the last Labour Government. I was elected in a by-election in June 1975 soon after Dame Judith Hart stepped down as Minister of Overseas Development—a post which seemed to be in and out of the Cabinet at the time. Between 1974 and 1979 we saw the reverse of what we have seen under the present Government.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

In the Government response to a report from the Select Committee on Overseas Development the first Minister for Overseas Development in the present Government said that because of economic circumstances it would not be possible to exempt overseas aid from the cuts in public spending. That may or may not have been appropriate in 1980, but it is certainly not appropriate now after eight years of the most significant economic growth in the European Community. We must join the Opposition to attain the 0.7 per cent. programme. Such partnership has been mentioned often by Labour and Liberal Democrat Members.

The Government and Conservative Members cannot take much pride in the good things that are happening in overseas development unless the commitment to the 0.7 per cent. programme is either scrapped, which I hope is inconceivable, or met. It would be far better to meet it. These issues do not need to be stressed to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, but they need to be brought to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

People must show a greater and more consistent interest in overseas aid, and that requires action at local community level. We need to develop individual responses from a significant minority of our constituents. That must be developed by communal action at parish level and by those who are not church-linked. Local developments matter most.

When the Brandt committee report was published in 1981 or 1982 the World Development Movement organised a lobby. It called for a voluntary donation of what I once said was £20 a head, but I was recently reminded that it was £6 a head. Only 600 people responded to that appeal and that is not a very good way to raise £60 each from 56 million people by Government decision. Work must continue with voluntary organisations also to increase voluntary gifts which can then be matched by what I hope will be the product of the work of the European Community on agricultural and medical research. The Community can help in other ways. There is a residual question about when the Community will have a presence in South Africa. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate spoke about some developments in that country and it is good to note that more hon. Members propose to see what can be done even while South Africa is in the middle of its very welcome transition.

I hope that the Community will not continue its sterile debate between directorate-general I and directorate-general VIII on whether South Africa should have a diplomat or someone involved in development, because it is quite apparent that South Africa needs a development expert now. In time perhaps it may have the first European Community directorate-general I representative as a delegate, but to begin with we should opt for the development expert.

The European Commission should try to find someone who knows about the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Committee and who has had experience in Namibia, where European Community help has been well absorbed. The relationships between South Africa and the states around and within it should be patched up, and for that job it is important to have someone who will be respected by the South Africans. He must not be a patsy but someone who has been willing to stand up to them in the past and has worked with South African representatives in Windhoek. That is a matter for the Community and for Governments, but I suspect that what I have said will be echoed by parliamentarians in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark and in most of the other Community countries.

There is a need for education in world citizenship and I am glad to see a small Government grant to the council for education in that subject. I think that that organisation was born as a result of the efforts of the grandfather of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley). One of the results of young men working and living at Toynbee hall was that not only did the first Earl Attlee go on to become leader of the Labour party and Prime Minister, nor that Beveridge produced in the early 1940s his report that led——

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): It was 1944.

Mr. Bottomley: I am grateful to the graduate from Oxford for giving me the date. It also produced Max Garnett, who went on beyond national politics into developing the concept of world citizenship, referred to by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). The right hon. Member spoke about the benefits of experience in the Voluntary Services Overseas. I am not sure that he is right to say that another country will gain much from a young British person aged 21 going to it. Far more, such a young person will come back enthused for the rest of his working life.

I know that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) did VSO. Anthony Bevins, a distinguished correspondent, who is not observing the debate, is another. People in advertising, the Civil Service and many other organisations have carried the benefit of their service overseas into their work. The Select Committee on Overseas Development took evidence in India in 1978 which showed how civil servants such as Michael Jay of the High Commission and Dick Alford of the British Council, having done similar work, have risen up through the Civil Service with an enthusiasm that helped to infect their work and our thinking.

World citizenship matters, and I hope that the Council for Education in World Citizenship will, on a limited scale, continue to make contact with teachers and pupils so that others will realise that the third world is not just a place to go for rest and recreation. It is a place to go to develop a sense of solidarity with the peoples of the world.

I should like to raise a number of points made in the book "Bad Samaritans—First World Ethics and Third World Debt", but other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall sum up in two ways. First, justice and righteousness need to flow. We cannot put up a barrier and keep them to ourselves. We need to allow the flow, to learn and to give—that is what sharing is all about. Secondly, we need to help people to grow their own prosperity, as we did with all the help that we got after the war with Marshall aid and from the IMF when it was necessary to borrow. As happens in India, the vast majority of resources, both human and capital, must be generated within the countries themselves. Even 10 years ago, 95 per cent. of capital investment in India came from its own resources.

We need to find ways to work with countries. Most recipients have a grant management department that tries to match what is on offer to what is needed so that projects are not determined by the donor countries—as other people may think.

I shall end with two short quotations from the book. One is from Pope John Paul II, who said:

"Anyone wishing to renounce the difficult yet noble task of improving the lot of. . .all people, with the excuse that the struggle is difficult and that constant effort is required, or simply because of the experience of defeat and the need to begin again, that person would be betraying the will of God the Creator."

If people start asking for a practical thing to do, I need quote only the concluding words of the book:

"The first step to a global conversion must be global acknowledgement that wrong is being done. Our new knowledge is a cause for optimism and a spur to action. Are those of us with two coats now prepared to give one away?"

1.38 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, South): I apologise to the House for not having been here for the Minister's speech and for part of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), but I had a 9 o'clock engagement in my constituency. What I heard of my hon. Friend's speech—the last part of it—was excellent. She put forward a serious case about the problems of the world, how the Labour party sees them and how a Labour Government will tackle them. We live in a world on the brink of environmental disaster. It will not happen suddenly one day but is growing apace. It will arise out of the worsening environmental problems.

The world is not just divided by poverty and by the misuse and misallocation of resources—it is increasingly divided by poverty and there is an increasing misallocation of resources. We must examine the quality of life for large numbers of people on our planet. There is a general north-south distinction, but there are also enormous imbalances within the economic systems of countries in western Europe and north America. The quality of life for people living in cardboard boxes under the theatres of the south bank is similar to that for people living in shanty towns in third-world countries. The system allows those people to live like that.

In general, for the majority of the world's population life is short, life expectancy is very short, income levels are low—and, in many places, declining—and the prospect for many people living in the poorest countries in Africa and Latin America does not include the opening of new schools, new hospitals and new social services centres and an improvement in social facilities—it is a prospect of hospital closed, school class sizes increased and of the quality of life constantly deteriorating.

Far from there being a constant flow of resources and aid from northern countries to southern countries, the opposite is the case, and has been for most of the past 200 years. Colonialism was not about exporting civilisations; it was not about improving the lot of people in the poorest countries—it was driven by greed and avarice and a determination to control other people's lives. It was about ensuring that the work, the raw materials and the food of the poorer countries flowed out to the richest parts of the world. That is the legacy of colonialism and imperialism that we have to deal with today. I honestly believe that the role of the world's twin financial institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, is essentially to reassert that old-world order so that once more a minority of northern, predominantly rich countries dominate the majority of southern, predominantly poor countries.

We frequently raise the issue of environmental destruction. I wish to quote from an article by S. M. Mohamed Idris in the current issue of *Third World Resurgence*, a magazine produced by Third World Network, of Penang in Malaysia. It produced excellent research material on the problems of third-world countries. The article is headed:

"What green really means for the Third World."

It states:

"As political leaders compete to show concern on the environment, confusion reigns on what is 'ecological'. Ecologists define sustainable development as a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, preserving the integrity of the ecology whilst enabling healthy human survival. But political and commercial elites think sustainable development merely means sustaining the supply of raw materials to continue the existing production systems."

That article well amplifies much of the problem.

People in the north are rightly concerned about the environment and rightly want changes to the environmental protection measures in this and in other countries, but they are not prepared to do anything about the economic system that brings about so much environmental destruction. The article also states that the effect of so-called development measures, the effect of economic restructuring in so many countries in the third world, is not to preserve and protect the environment, but is to finance and encourage environmental destruction.

A magazine produced by Survival International states:

"The Brazilian Union of Indigenous Nations . . . and . . . Ailton Krenak, has been awarded the Greek 1990 Onassis Prize for Man and Society."

In receiving that prize, people referred to their experience of life in the Brazilian rain forests and to their friends and compatriots who have been killed by the armed forces, which have gone into the Brazilian rain forests to clear the way for logging and mining companies and for road development. They said:

"All of us carry the memory of the day when the world supported all of its people—feeding us, taking care of us, putting us to sleep with the songs of the birds, rivers, waterfalls and forests. Were we an undeveloped world then? Were the international development institutions created to silence the birds, and to cut down the forests . . . When we transform the planet into a large desert—is that the day when we will be truly developed?"

They have an understanding of life that many people in this country find hard to imagine.

The destruction of the rain forests by logging companies, of savanna grassland, and of so many other aspects of our environment that are essential to continuing ecosystems, together with the overfishing and pollution of the seas, have been brought about by an economic system that encourages not development but dependence on an international trade system that essentially benefits the northern countries, and their multinational corporations in particular.

The relationship between aid, trade, development and environment is very important. I fully support, of course, the donation by the richer countries of 0·7 per cent. of their gross national product as part of their aid programmes. It is important that aid should be of good quality. However, for all the aid that is given there is a return not of onefold or fivefold, but tenfold and more in debt repayments by the poorest countries. Their total debt is currently $1·3

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

trillion and, frankly, it is unpayable. It was incurred because those countries were encouraged to borrow large sums at the time of the petrodollar boom in the early 1970s, to meet the cost of industrial development programmes. At the same time, they were encouraged to produce more of their basic commodities—cocoa, rice, tea, coffee, minerals, and tin in particular. The problem is that they control neither the interest rates at which that debt is fixed nor the prices that they receive for their commodities.

The present crisis of debt repayment means that many countries are forced to borrow more money—and to pay the interest on the new debt, they borrow more money still. To meet the interest on that debt, they borrow yet again. It is rather like mortgaging one's house six times over, every time that one falls into arrears with mortgage repayments. I seem to be losing the attention of some of my hon. Friends, but I hope that they too understand that remortgaging and remortgaging leads ultimately to disaster.

That disastrous situation was met by the west, with the Latin American countries united in threatening non-repayment of their debts, with the Baker and Brady plans, which imposed on those Latin American countries an economic model that ensured not that they paid less, but that they incurred more debt for deregulation of their economies, cuts in public expenditure, and passing poverty on to the poorest of their people.

British banks say that they have suffered as as result of the debt crisis, yet in 1989 alone, they achieved tax write-offs of £1,700 million in respect of debt non-repayments, which is considerably more than the British aid programme.

United States aid to Latin America over the next period is likely to be $2 billion, yet debt repayments by those countries to the United States over the same period are likely to total $20 billion—tenfold the value of the aid. If we are to redress world imbalances, we must confront the question of commodity prices. The GATT round is being treated as an argument between the United States and western Europe. That round, and the economic model behind it, is disastrous for the poorest people in the poorest countries of the world. It encourages multi-national agribusiness into third-world countries, and discourages food self-sufficiency. It encourages environmental destruction and discourages environmental protection. There has to be a real interest in the prices paid for basic commodities rather than the present system.

Unless we address those problems from the point of view of a world where development is genuinely sustainable, where protection of the environment is vital, where the earth's wealth is redistributed in favour of the poorest people in the poorest countries, in the next few years we shall face a growing imbalance between north and south. Ever-increasing numbers of people will flee from environmental destruction—from rain forest destruction, increased desertification and the increased flooding linked to that. Millions of people will have to flee from the places where they grew up and live and there will be growing imbalances in the world, and growing poverty. There has to be a change in the relationship. That means that higher prices must be paid for commodities. It means that there must be an increased aid programme, and an understanding that we are all in this together, rather than the reassertion of the economic models that are being imposed upon us and upon other countries at present.

For many people the problems that they face are summed up in an answer to a question put to a Sri Lankan Minister at a United Nations meeting. A journalist asked him why third-world countries went to the UN with monotonous regularity to complain about the same problems of debts, restructuring, aid, development and the environment. He answered that it was quite simple—it was because we all have the same Finance Minister, the International Monetary Fund.

I am delighted that we are having this debate today. I suspect that the House will have to return to this subject more often. If we do not, we shall be reneging on our responsibilities to consider the world globally and internationally, rather than in the selfish way in which the current economic doctrines of the IMF and the World bank insist that we consider it.

1.51 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I could not agree more with what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has said. He is very knowledgeable on this subject and he is right that we will have to return to it again.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, it is remarkable that this is one of the rare occasions when there has been a debate on overseas aid. Most of the time such debates have been in Opposition time. Contrast that with the fact that only the other day, a full day's debate was devoted to destroying the environment in the middle east. That was what we were about when we discussed in an Adjournment debate the question of supporting American troops in the Gulf, under the guise of discussing the United Nations.

We all know what the score is. I find it remarkable that the Minister or any other hon. Member on the Tory Benches can consider the problem of aid to the Third world and the underdeveloped world, while on 15 January or thereafter they will take part in helping to destroy large areas of the middle east. They have even talked about the use of nuclear weapons. Now it is the practice to fight wars in the Third world. Since the second world war, most wars have been in underdeveloped countries. They say, "We have some new technology, equipment and munitions, let us try them out." They had eight years of practice in Iran and Iraq. The Government, along with the Americans, Russians, Germans, French and all the rest, used that eight-year war to test their new technology.

The Government have a cheek. "Goody Two-Shoes," the Minister, comes along today in her hunting jacket, and tells us that she feels sorry about the Third world and its problems, yet the Government are going to blast some of them off the face of the earth. It really does show the Government up.

Arms are being sold all the time. More is being spent on arms than is being spent to feed little kids in Ethiopia and the Sudan, with their little pot bellies and spindly legs. Every so often we see them on television and everyone is supposed to feel sorry. Here we have a Government who have had £100 billion in oil revenue—never before have we had such riches in this country—but they cannot find

enough money to help the Third world, or an amount equivalent to that paid out by the Labour Government in 1979, although that was not enough.

What do the Government do next? They say that they will give aid through the Common Market—the great wonderful Common Market that they talk so much about. What a joke. I remember what the Tories were saying in 1971—"Join the Common Market. We will have the Lomé convention and we will feed the third world." What has happened since? They have piled up all the food. There are wine lakes and all sorts of other things—there was no wine lake when Lord Jenkins was around, because he supped it all. They have all this food, and what happens? They destroy it. They introduce schemes and say to farmers, "For God's sake, don't produce any food." They say that they will have a set-aside scheme, and they pay farmers £80 an acre to watch the grass grow.

Millions of people in Africa, central and south America and other parts of the world, including little babies, have to rely on Terry Wogan and one or two others on the BBC. The Government try to salve their conscience by setting up some little scheme that might help for the day. We are talking about 12 countries in the Common Market, some of the richest in the world. If they wanted, they could feed all those people without any problem.

This country has a greater responsibility than most. When I was a kid at school, people said, "All these pink pieces belong to Britain. We have India, Canada, Australia and all these countries in Africa." What was the game? The colonial masters of yesteryear, the Tories of their day, were ripping off those countries to take all their minerals, food and God knows what else. We have a bigger responsibility than even some of the other countries in the tinpot Common Market. The Lomé convention did not deliver the goods. It could not do so because it dealt with capitalist nations. They are not in the business of helping anyone; they are in the business of making profits. If they have too much food, someone says, "You are producing too much. We are not making profits. Get rid of it. Burn it." But Ministers tell us that they have a heart.

The Minister spoke about debts. As I said, this is a scandal. The impoverished countries want their debts written off, as my hon. Friends said, but in the past three years since the 1987 general election, the Government have written off debts for the top four clearing banks in Britain —National Westminster, Midland, Barclays and Lloyds —amounting to £3 billion. Why? The Government did so because those banks overreached themselves in the third world. The Government have allowed their tax liabilities to be written off, but that money should have gone to write off the debts of the impoverished third-world countries. The banks have made massive profits during the past 11 years under the Government.

The Minister talked about help from the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. What do we expect from them? Most of the time the IMF and the World bank say, "We will give you a few bob if you behave yourself." What does "Behave yourself" mean? In political terms, it means adopting privatisation measures—

Mr. Corbyn: Closing hospitals.

Mr. Skinner: —closing hospitals and accepting tobacco. That is what it is about. We are not likely to get anywhere in that regard.

The Minister did not mention the Export Credits Guarantee Department because she was too embarrassed to do so. That insurance company stood the test of time until recently. What is more, its purpose was to enable third-world countries to buy goods on tick, sometimes writing off debts. That great insurance scheme was solvent under all previous Governments. What happened under this lot—the Government of entrepreneurs, the Cabinet full of business men and one woman, who reckon that they are smarter than anyone else and that they know the answers to all the economic problems? They have Chancellors of the Exchequer coming out of every pore. The Government get the ECGD bankrupt and then sell it off.

It staggers me that the Government have the nerve to talk about giving money to the third world. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Cynon Valley put the case in a nutshell: the amount of money going to the third world in overseas aid is almost half what it was. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) said that much of that is linked with private enterprise. The third-world countries have to buy those goods or they will not receive the money.

Then the Minister mentioned parliamentary democracy. Apparently one of the things that we have which is valuable is our democratic system. We are told that we should go out to third-world countries and tell them to adopt the great system that we have here. Well, they would be happy on a Friday when only 10 Members of Parliament turn up for the debate. A lot of hon. Members on the Tory side are moonlighting in the City making money hand over fist. Five or six of them have about nine jobs apiece and 19 former Tory Cabinet Ministers have 59 directorships between them. Yet we tell third-world countries, "We want you to have parliamentary democracy on British lines." What a joke. We offer them the House of Lords rolled in. We have a wonderful tribal system. We tell them, "You have a tribal system in Africa. But we have one that is better." The Lords all get fetched up in fancy frocks and there are witch doctors and all the rest of it. They do not have to be elected. They are like tribal chiefs and they last for ever. If they are not lords, people can have a baronetcy and become a knight. What a joke. Yet the Government tell us that this is the mother of Parliaments and that we have to spread the system all over the world. Am I supposed to buy that?

Mrs. Chalker: This is not relevant to the debate.

Mr. Skinner: Everything that I am referring to is in response to what the Minister said in her opening speech. She talked about spreading this democracy.

Of course, the third world could have the royal family, too. Well I would be happy for it to have the royal family, but I am not too sure that the royals would want to go to the Third world. They might have to pay taxes if they went somewhere else.

Remarkably, the Minister gave advice on slum projects in India and Pakistan. What a cheek. The Government have developed cardboard city on a grand scale. There are thousands of homeless people in London littered round the streets and the stations. Yet the Minister comes here and says that she is telling the Indians and Pakistanis how to deal with the problem of slums. By God, the Indians and Pakistanis want some help with that problem, but the Government have a cheek to talk about solutions when

[Mr. Skinner]

they refuse to build public sector houses. Hardly any public sector houses have been built in the past few years with the result that all these people are without a roof over their heads.

I shall come to my last point because other hon. Members want to speak. It is about the environment. I detect that this entrepreneurial, market-forces Government are giving a nod and a wink to the third world and saying, "We have got problems with the ozone layer." The Government have just discovered that they cannot patch up the ozone layer with market forces. As I told the previous Prime Minister, that problem cannot be resolved with a man, a bike, a ladder and an enterprise allowance. It will have to be done by collective action.

What are the Government doing? We have caused the problems but they say to the third world, "For God's sake don't you cause that problem. We will tell you how not to create problems for the planet." What a cheek. All the industrialised nations, mainly in the northern, temperate zone have despoiled the planet and caused havoc. Now they have the cheek to go round the world pontificating and telling Third-world countries that they had better not do the same. The industrialised nations destroyed the rain forests and everything else to feed and look after people in this part of the world.

By and large the debate should have been headed "Hypocrisy by the Tory Government" because that is roughly what it was. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West referred to that earlier. The Government come here on a Friday and talk about giving peanuts to the people who are starving. Yet we are part of a group of nations including the Common Market, America, Japan and all the rest which, if it had the will and took collective action, could feed the people in Africa and all the other third-world countries. We could feed them 10 times over, but we would have to get rid of the capitalist system if we really wanted to do it well.

2.4 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I endorse the comments of the previous two contributors to our debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), in his inimitable way, pointed to the double standards and hypocrisy surrounding the debate. He could have mentioned the so-called sweeteners from British Aerospace to Rover. That £80 million—nearly £1 billion—could have been transferred directly to the aid budget where it would have been put to much better use. Tribute has already been paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) for his work for the Kurds. He consistently argues about the enormity of the disaster which faces the world and needs to be addressed, and his arguments are often ignored. The truth is that the underdeveloped world will face even more misery than it does now.

The debt problem has not been resolved. Interest repayments mean that the poor pay for the rich. Those repayments amount to more than $15 billion a year, which means lives lost. That money could be spent on food and the economy. Those debts should be written off. France has written off large chunks of debt. We have not and it is a scandal.

Mrs. Chalker: What about the £1 billion that has been written off?

Mr. Cohen: The Minister will have a chance to reply.

The recession will make matters much worse. Already developing countries are desperately worried about eastern Europe which, rightly, will need aid to feed its people, preserve its environment and build up the various national economies. The underdeveloped countries are worried that that will take aid from them. 1992 will mean protection barriers around the rich western European countries. That, too, will adversely affect the underdeveloped world.

One of the lesser obscenities in the Gulf crisis is the United States asking Saudi Arabia, Germany, Japan and other countries for money to pay for the war effort it is promoting there. In the end third-world countries are the most impoverished by what is happening in the Gulf.

On top of that we have foolish restrictions. I shall mention just one. The American war in Vietnam and the sanctions which it has effectively imposed worldwide have impoverished Vietnam. Vietnam has now found oil, which could save it. There is natural gas on top of the oil. Because of the stupid boycott which America is enforcing throughout the world, Vietnam will have to burn off the natural gas to reach the oil. That is a scandal. The Minister has said that aid arrangements to Vietnam are under review. They have been under review for ages. In the words of the Prime Minister, the Minister should be "her own woman" and tell the United States to scrap the stupid boycott.

I have just come back from a trip to Bangladesh. This is a historic time for it with the political upheavals and struggle for democracy which are taking place and which, I hope, will succeed. I shall mention the aid issues, not the political ones. Dhaka university needs an aid project to help it to improve education. Experts told us that there had not been exams for seven years—that in a country which is trying to establish compulsory schooling and which needs middle managers. There have been some brutal assaults on students of Dhaka university—just like those in Tiananmen square, but on a smaller scale. We should provide aid now, so that educational opportunities are improved at the university, in an attempt to stop such brutality. That funding is also vital for improving the country's infrastructure.

Aid should also be provided for the heritage of that country. The tribal people of the Chittagong hill tracts have suffered a mass migration as their way of life has been threatened. Worse is to come for those people, so we must preserve their culture.

We should establish business links with Bangladesh. The most important thing, however, is for the infrastructure to be improved so that there is proper sanitation—a comprehensive, modern sewerage system—and a plentiful supply of clean water. The profits from one day's arms trade could pay for clean water not just for Bangladesh, but everywhere. It is a scandal that that priority is slipping further down the agenda rather than remaining at the top.

Primary health care and hospital development should be funded in Bangladesh as the capitalist system in that poor country cannot provide for it. At this stage there is no profit to be gained from initiating such developments. One of the saddest things has been the spread of Thatcher's privatisation ethos to Bangladesh. The state has sought to

disengage itself from its responsibilities and that has contributed to Bangladesh's decline. At best, privatisation is an absolute irrelevance to Bangladesh as it is elsewhere.

People in Bangladesh told me that the donor countries should monitor the provision of aid to ensure that there is no corruption. Rumours are rife about the misuse of funds, but I am sure that such corruption occurs in other countries. If donor countries provide such monitoring, however, the British Government, as a key donor, must take control and insist that there is no corruption and misuse of funds. They must take responsibility.

Aid must be linked to democratic development, especially in Bangladesh, where the army should be kept out of power. If that does not happen, aid should be stopped. We should seek to help that country's burgeoning democracy by offering to send observers from the Commonwealth, the European Parliament and the United Nations to ensure that its democracy can develop. The way forward for Bangladesh is through democracy and development.

2.12 pm

Mrs. Clwyd: With the leave of the House I shall speak again. One thing that this debate has proved has been hon. Members' anxiety to put their views on aid and development. We do not have enough opportunity to make our views known. Given that the Government do not have a heavy legislative programme for the new year, they should make prime time available—not an Adjournment debate—to debate this important issue. In the past year and a half the Government have not made available any time to debate it. All the time allocated has come from the Opposition because we give this subject its rightful priority.

My hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) spoke with great passion. However, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) said that he detected a note of sourness in our speeches. Any sourness is due to the fact that we are angry because the Government have slashed aid to some of the poorest people in the world. In 1979, when Labour left office, Britain spent 0·51 per cent. of GNP on aid. We are angry because during the past 11 years under the Conservatives we have witnessed large cuts in aid. The Minister for Overseas Development has seen the level of aid drop to 0·32 per cent. of GNP. From being one of the most generous donors in Europe, we have become one of the most miserly, however the figures are presented, ranking 14th out of the 18 OECD countries. That is why Opposition Members feel strongly about it, and we are not afraid to say so.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford talked in emollient terms about the need to increase aid. We appreciate his concern for the third world, but throughout the years of Conservative rule he has allowed aid levels to fall. He has had every opportunity to defeat the Government on aid issues. I cannot recall many occasions when he has voted with the Opposition in an endeavour to increase British aid. He uses many nice words when speaking about British aid. No doubt he has used many more in the past 11 years trying to persuade the Government to increase the proportion of our GNP devoted to overseas aid. None of that has had any effect, to the point where today the aid budget is stagnant, however the figures are presented.

The Minister disagreed with some of the figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West. He was talking about the budget in real terms, not in the terms in which the Minister will no doubt reply to the debate. No wonder we are angry, for we recall the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), saying in 1983 that when economic circumstances permitted, we would move towards the UN target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP going to overseas aid.

Last year the Government said that we had a higher standard of living than we had ever known. The problem is not that we cannot afford to give the third world more aid but that the Government do not want to give more. Had the Government maintained Labour's commitment to the third world from 1979 onwards, the third world would be better off by £8 billion.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) spoke about the amounts spent on arms by the developing countries. Anyone who has been to Ethiopia must deplore the fact that 40 per cent. of its budget goes on military equipment.

Mr. Wells: The figure is 70 per cent.

Mrs. Clwyd: I hear the hon. Gentleman's intervention. If, like other Conservative Members who have spoken, he is serious about achieving the target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP, he should accept, with the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), that the best way to get it is through a Labour Government.

All hon. Members, including Conservative Members, have talked about poverty in the third world. The Government cannot claim that the ODA targets the poorest people. After the Minister made that claim at the refugee conference, I asked her to set out the evidence on which it was based. She could say only that in India alone, £130 million went on poverty alleviation. But as she has revealed in countless written answers to me, India is the only country for which the ODA compiles statistics of aid devoted to poverty alleviation.

Many of my hon. Friends have spoken of the importance of tackling the debt problems of third-world countries. Developing countries cannot possibly grow their way out of the debt crisis as debt payments are made to the rich. Those sums totalled $52 billion last year. Debt repayments leave no money for investment in growth.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said, Labour Members have been pushing for United Kingdom banks to contribute to debt relief by a change in the tax law. Some Labour Members tabled an amendment to that effect to the previous Finance Bill. At present banks receive tax relief on the provisions they set aside against bad third-world debts. They invest the subsidy at a hefty profit, but have no obligation to pass on any of the tax relief as debt relief, which is ridiculous and ludicrous. Tax relief in 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, is estimated at £1·7 billion—more than the entire aid budget. If hon. Members are serious about doing something to resolve the problem, they should have voted for our amendment to the Finance Bill.

I am anxious to hear the Minister's reply to our questions. The Opposition have definite proposals—we would like a White Paper on development and an

[Mrs. Clwyd]

educational initiative from the Government. We want the Government to adopt the World bank's constructive proposals on tackling poverty and we would particularly like them to raise the aid budget to 0·7 per cent. of the gross national product. However, I doubt whether any of those steps will be taken under this Government.

The Labour party's policy is clear: we intend to put the overseas aid portfolio in the Cabinet. That is why we were pushing so hard in our support for the Minister. We did so not because she is a woman but because she has considerable ability—none of us would take that away from her—and we want her and her portfolio to take their rightful place in the Cabinet, not merely to be an arm of the Foreign Office. If that were the case, as it will be under a Labour Government, overseas development will have its rightful place among the other Government Departments and we shall be able to argue much more vigorously for the needs of the third world than the Minister is able to do at present.

2.22 pm

Mrs. Chalker: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, until about 40 minutes ago I was going to say that we were having an interesting and worthwhile debate, and I shall concentrate on what happened during the first four hours of the debate.

I noted that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a contribution from the Opposition Dispatch Box at the beginning of the debate. From his ranting and raving a few minutes ago, we might gather that that was a sign of how overseas policy will be put in future if the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) does not get on top of the problem, which means controlling the hon. Member for Bolsover.

The approach of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley to the challenging task of development and aid was, as ever, highly partial. It is not just a matter of money, but persuading recipient Governments to implement the critically necessary reforms. Proper use of aid money is essential and it has to be used imaginatively. That means encouraging developing countries' Governments to break away from their bureaucratic, old socialist ideas if they are to succeed. I did not see much evidence that many of the Opposition speakers had been able to break away from those bureaucratic, old socialist ideas.

As the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) clearly implied, if developing countries are to overcome their poverty, they must be able to attract investment and get on with their own business through firm economic reforms. If they do not do so, they will not be able to succeed, despite the Government helping them to do so.

There have been a number of strange comments about net resource transfers. Net flows to Africa are substantially positive. In 1989 the inflows to sub-saharan Africa exceeded outflows by $14 billion. Those are not my figures, but figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It is clear that the countries classified by the United Nations as the least developed are receiving more—$13 billion more—in new loans and grants than the interest and principal they repaid. This country has not only written off £1 billion of debts, but ensured that all our aid to the poorest countries is on grant terms.

Our thinking has moved on a long way since 1975—not 1978—when the Labour Government produced their White Paper. We have a development strategy, clearly outlined in the Government's reply to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's report on bilateral aid in 1987. That set out our view on how best to secure sustainable growth. It also set out our concern about poverty. I and my predecessor have reiterated those ideas in speech after speech in the past five years.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley suggested that our approach in the ODA to structural adjustment was out of tune with that of other donors. That is not true. It is a major achievement of the past five years that the thinking of the international community on adjustment issues has converged. The special programme of assistance to Africa shows how effectively those views have converged. I share the World bank president's view that efficient development must enable the poor to use their main asset—their labour. That is why we have supported price reforms that give peasant farmers the incentive to produce more, and why we argued for less protection so that countries plentiful in labour do not invest in capital-intensive socialist-style industries. It is also why we are financing slum improvement programmes with the help of local people who seek to help poor people to use their labour productively to generate greater income.

The hon. Members for Cynon Valley and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) claimed that my colleagues in charge of other Government Departments were not concerned about the effect of their policies on development issues. They could not be more wrong. I have already made it clear that we are fully aware that international trade liberalisation is crucial for the developing countries.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also spoke about tied aid. The proportion of tied aid to total United Kingdom bilateral aid, which includes CDC and local costs, both of which are untied, has been about 70 per cent. over the past four years. The DAC average, about which the hon. Lady seemed pleased, is only 51 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford referred to the IMF and the World bank playing a leading role in negotiated reform programmes, which we support. We are prominent on those bodies' boards and we work hard to ensure that the reforms are properly and thoughtfully implemented. We know of the problems that some developing countries face because of debts to those organisations, but in general multilateral debt is only a small part of total developing country debt. For the poorer countries, for which multilateral debt is a problem, the IMF's enhanced structural adjustment facility provides the way forward. It is a £4·5 billion facility and it offers an interest rate of 0·5 per cent. As such it is one of the best ways of helping countries such as Guyana to get out of the difficulties that they have faced. The United Kingdom is the largest single contributor to the interest subsidy costs of the ESAF, but we are also seeking to help indebted countries by ensuring that all new World bank lending is on highly concessional terms. We must preserve the financial integrity of those institutions—that is in the interests of the whole developing world.

The House is well aware of our policy towards official debt. We have been generous; we have forgiven £1 billion in the past. But I want to make one more point about the

Trinidad terms, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister initiated when Chancellor. They would provide substantial debt relief for the poorest countries pursuing reform. I hope that we shall obtain the support of all the donor countries, including Japan, for the Trinidad terms initiative because it can do more than anything else to help those countries.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred to the problems of private debt. He knows that we have supported the Brady plan, which allows IMF and World bank resources to be used directly for debt reduction in deals with private banks. Six countries have already benefited from that.

My hon Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) made an interesting speech. I welcome the fact that the private sector—the CDC or any of the other organisations—plays a large part in helping the Third world. In most developing countries farmers are the largest private sector element and we seek to help them with training, better seeds and better crops.

Good government has two dimensions, political and economic. We are making it quite clear to every recipient country what we expect in terms of human rights and good government. We are encouraging countries in which things have been wrong in the past to put them right. We welcome Zambia's decision to adopt multi-party political systems. My hon. Friends are right to say that Zambia has a long way to go with its economy, but it is critical for us to help Zambia to do the right thing. We do that by training its judges and policemen and by helping it to have the right sort of organisations. Not only will the people of Zambia learn from us, but the country will have a better outlook.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

HEALTH

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. James Couchman, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Alice Mahon, Sir David Price, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Roger Sims, the Reverend Martin Smyth, Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Audery Wise be members of the Health Committee—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Motion made, and Question proposed.

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West), Mr. Ian McCartney and Mr. Patrick Nicholls be members of the Social Security Committee.—*[Sir Marcus Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

The Borders (Rural Policy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I invite the House to turn from the urgent need for action on overseas development to the need for action on rural issues in the United Kingdom and in particular in the Borders. I hope to illustrate the need for a more co-ordinated Government approach to rural development in the Borders, but the argument can be extended and a similar case made for other landward areas of Scotland furth of the highlands and islands. Some may argue that it could also be extended to the Highlands and Islands development board because the landward areas in the whole of Scotland require urgent examination from time to time. Since 1979 that task has not been addressed with sufficient urgency by the Government.

The Borders covers an area of 1,820 sq m. It has a population of 102,000 and is therefore one of the most sparsely populated regions in Europe with an average of 122 people per sq km. Interestingly, that compares with the average figure for Scotland of 65, a United Kingdom average of 231 and a European Community average of 142 people per sq km. The dispersal of population affects every aspect of public policy. It affects transport in terms of access and cost, the provision of education, and especially the provision of adequate primary schools in rural areas. It has consequences for the cost of living, given the increased costs of transport and other factors.

The rate of pay in manufacturing industries in the Borders is low. The dispersal of population also affects social work provision, planning development and housing. The provision of services in the area cannot ignore that spread of population and the difficulties of topography and geography.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): My hon. Friend's argument was given further weight by this week's report from Shelter, which campaigns for the homeless, saying that homelessness has risen faster in the rural areas of Scotland than in the urban areas because of the lack of rented housing.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who succinctly raises a matter that I intended to mention. It is worrying that problems which were previously considered urban are now being visited on people in rural areas. The Government will ignore that at their cost. Anyone who sets out to paint a fairly bleak picture of the Borders would not have to look far for evidence to suggest that things could get extremely bad.

Agriculture is currently facing a great deal of uncertainty. The Borders have less-favoured area status and receive special provision. The livestock sector in the Borders is suffering great uncertainty and has experienced substantial reductions in net farm incomes over the past 12 months. We are apprehensive about the hill farm review, which is due out in the next few weeks and may be able to do something about that problem. In the short term, the Government should increase support in the hill livestock compensatory allowance for the livestock industry so that it can see its way through to next year, never mind the years beyond. The arable sector is also waiting with bated breath to learn its fate at the hands of the GATT

[Mr. Kirkwood]

negotiations. That is a changing situation. The talks broke down last week and are to be resumed next year, but there is a widespread feeling that the Government were all too willing to sell the industry short. Despite the position taken by British Ministers, the EC Commissioner for agriculture, Mr. MacSharry, has bought some valuable extra time to ensure that a living can be made in the arable sector.

It is not an exaggeration to say that if farmers cannot make a living in areas like the Borders, those areas cannot prosper, farming will suffer, and the whole rural economy in the landward areas of Scotland will be in danger of collapse. The importance of a sustainable agricultural sector in such areas cannot be overstated. If agriculture were to fail, the consequences would be great. The same can be said of the future of the fishing industry. The coastal communities that I represent on the eastern seaboard of Berwickshire are uncertain about their future. Towns like Eyemouth depend on the continuing prosperity of the catching sector of the inshore fleet and on the onshore processing industry. They ask me what future they are likely to have. Even now, the community is considering greater restraints on the fishing industry for 1991. The total allowable catches may be cut, the capacity of the fleet may be cut and the supplies of raw material to the fish processors will decrease so much that it will make it almost impossible for them to plan processing profitably unless they turn to fish imported from Canada, Iceland and elsewhere.

The fishing and agriculture sectors are under much pressure and the textile industry is facing a testing time. The Minister will know that in the past few weeks, three factories in Hawick in my constituency have closed, with the loss of hundreds of jobs. The latest is the closure, announced yesterday, of Hawick Co, with the loss of 80 jobs. The textile industry is trying to cope with difficult circumstances, including climate changes, changes in fashion and style, increases in the price of raw materials, high interest rates and fluctuating exchange rates. It is waiting with bated breath to learn what agreement, if any, the GATT round will achieve in the transitional phasing-out of the multi-fibre arrangement, linkage of strengthened rules and disciplines within the new negotiating process in the GATT talks and the all-important access that it needs to third-country markets. In addition, the electronics industry is experiencing ever-greater pressure from overseas suppliers and is having to contend with high interest rates and fluctuating exchange rates.

The future does not look good in terms of the established, stable base and methods of producing wealth, creating employment and sustaining jobs in the Borders. A gloomy picture could be painted, but, while none of that is scaremongering and all of it is realistic, the future need not be grim. With a fair wind and sensitive support from central Government, working in co-ordination with the local authorities, the future of the Borders could be rosy. I do not want to denigrate the Government's provisions. They have put extra money into roads and electrifying the east-coast route, and into other departmental budgets in a helpful way. Unless there is a more co-ordinated approach to the way that the problems interface in a rural area as disparate as the Borders, the future will be more bleak than it need be.

We must remember that since 1979 there has been a systematic withdrawal by central Government of a whole series of regional support measures. The start of the withdrawal of assisted area status began in 1979, and it was eventually phased out in August 1982. If that package of regional support existed today, the job creation capacity and potential of the Borders region would have been much greater. In support of that agreement, I quote evidence produced by the Industry Department for Scotland in a research paper published in July 1988. It concluded:

"Had the package remained in effect, the study area would contain more enterprises better able to compete and provide more jobs than they are likely to do."

I subscribe strongly to that view.

The Borders region no longer has any sort of development status, and potentially serious consequences flow from that. We are no longer eligible for any assistance from the European regional development fund in Brussels. In April 1985 we lost priority status for the European social fund, so we are denied access to that potential source of assistance. We have no access to any structural fund, although I am aware that there are discussions about the criteria for that. We made an application the last time the list was published for the areas that were eligible, but the Borders region was not accepted for that initial list. We shall continue to argue that we should be on the list. Almost by definition, we do not have access to urban aid and the systems of support that are used to great effect in the central industrial belt of Scotland.

The main justification for removing assisted area status, which has left us with no assistance at all, appears to be based on the fact that the Borders region has relatively low unemployment. The Government must reconsider the criteria for determining which areas are suitable for assistance. There is an acute shortage of officially published statistics for rural areas. There is no accepted series of statistics and data that have any appreciation of rural factors and indicators. The latest example of that, which has caused much public discussion, is that the Department of Employment has been unable to tell us the average income in the Borders region. I understand that there are technical problems because the Department does not have a large enough base from which to draw the data. That means that the Borders region is the only mainland region that does not have access to figures showing the average net income figure. It leaves the Government in a difficult position when trying to judge whether the Borders region is eligible for the different sorts of assistance. The Government are relatively ignorant of rural problems, as are associated public bodies and agencies.

The SDA has done much valuable work in terms of environmental improvements and support services, but there have been great constraints on the economic instruments that it has been able to use in rural areas, particularly in the Borders. For example, the valuable scheme to sponsor the development of rural workshops, which provided conversion grants for rural properties so that they could be transformed into industrial premises, has been withdrawn. I emphasise the potential in the Borders for local enterprise companies, and I certainly wish them well. However, when Scottish Natural Heritage starts in April, it might be much more effective if Government and EEC funding were made available to it.

There is concern about incomes in the Borders, but I have already referred to that in passing and will not dwell on the point. My right hon. Friend the Member for

Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) talked about housing, and I wanted to mention the increasing homelessness that we have been suffering recently. Access to transport is also a great problem, particularly for those living in the Borders region, and I cannot see it getting better.

I say in a non-partisan way that the Government must confront the cost of fuel and, for environmental reasons, they must impose constraints on the extent to which people use petrol and diesel. That will create major problems for people living in disparate areas. Under a simple price mechanism, some people will have to pay through the nose. A solution that might suit Trafalgar square could be unacceptable in the Borders.

Does the Minister acknowledge that rural needs cannot be measured simply by unemployment rates, and will he take other indicators, such as income levels, into account in the future? Does he accept the need for a rural areas strategy, with proper co-ordination of all Government agencies? Does he accept that the programmes of publicly funded rural workshops and factories are essential if jobs are to be created? Does he acknowledge the vital importance of the social aspect of the economic work of the LECs and other agencies? Community facilities are just as important as economic measures in rural areas. Finally, does the Minister accept that local authorities and rural voluntary agencies have a continuing and vital role in providing a successful rural development programme in the Borders and elsewhere?

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on his success in achieving this Adjournment debate. It feels like an annual progress report, because the hon. Gentleman's previous debate was on 28 July 1989. Nevertheless, I am glad to respond today.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—who had to rush off for another engagement—mentioned housing. We have put in place Scottish Homes' rural strategy, and all aspects relating to rural areas, including homelessness, will be addressed. Also, the Tweedbank development will assist in the provision of housing for rent in the central Borders. That is another major project under way by Scottish Homes. I strongly recommend that the councils keep in close touch, which I am sure they will.

I am aware of the redundancies mentioned by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, but there is also good news. Slumberdown International of Hawick has announced a £2·5 million joint venture that will provide 40 new jobs immediately and 100 over the next two or three years, which is encouraging. As to Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, Shanks and MacEwan has won orders worth £51 million, most of them concerned with road and bridge building works, and other new book orders are worth £4·5 million. One must take the whole picture into account.

I pay tribute to Borders regional council, which has taken a far-sighted attitude to the region's development. It mounted a three-day conference, "Rural Development: Future Strategies", at which the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and I both spoke. That conference and the comments made by the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire today suggest that there is a considerable consensus on what requires to be done to secure the future of rural communities, especially the Borders.

We might identify three main elements of that consensus. First, we agree that development must be sustainable, meaning that the local community and its culture should, if at all possible, be enhanced by development and certainly not damaged. Secondly, decisions should be made by local people. They are aware of the particular opportunities available to the community, and the strengths of the community, which can be exploited to the advantage of all who live there. Thirdly, there should be a co-ordinated framework of policies within which those decisions can be made. I shall return to that point in a moment.

We believe that the Scottish Office has taken significant steps to ensure that those elements are in place. At the end of his speech on 28 July the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire gave me a stern warning that he wished to see a strategy for rural development. We have done much since then towards developing that aim. The Secretary of State gave me the task of co-ordinating our policies for rural areas and I have adopted the following objectives:

"To establish a coherent and integrated policy framework within which those who live in rural areas can derive improving standards and quality of living by using the local resource base in a sustainable way while maintaining the environment."

Within the Scottish Development Department I have a small but high-powered team assisting in that task. I am watching all the policy initiatives within the Scottish Office to ensure that they conform to the ideas set out in that aim. Other departments and bodies, such as the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands development board are aware of the vital need for a co-ordinated response and approach.

I recognise that there are continuing calls for the Government to set out a rural strategy. Such calls suggest that it is possible and sensible to identify common features in rural areas in all parts of Scotland. In many ways that is a difficult task. While rural areas share the characteristics of low population density and an economy in which agriculture figures large, they have as many features that differentiate them as those that join them. The highlands of Scotland and the Borders are both rural areas, but obviously have different outlooks. In my view, the right approach is to establish a unified policy framework, involving not only Scottish Homes but local enterprise companies and Scottish Natural Heritage, each of those bodies with a local network working closely in co-operation with local authorities. In other words, since our previous debate we have been thinking of developments and developing strategies to meet the needs at local level.

For those reasons we have placed an emphasis on creating enabling frameworks, so that local people can tackle the issues facing their areas in their own ways. The local enterprise companies which are now being set up, will provide the ideal medium for grasping local employment and training opportunities. We made it clear to Scottish Enterprise that we expected to develop strategies appropriate to rural areas, in consultation with the local enterprise companies. Most of the activities will be

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

undertaken by local enterprise companies, in partnership with local communities, to identify the needs, opportunities and priorities for their areas. To help them achieve that, local enterprise companies will have a significant amount of delegated responsibility to commit public expenditure—up to £250,000 on any one project—and discretion to devise specific initiatives to stimulate development, reflecting local circumstances. We believe that that local involvement is the best way to stimulate development in the rural, as well as the urban areas. Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies will ensure that appropriate account is taken of rural communities. We expect that local enterprise companies will provide assistance and advice tailored to the needs of their areas.

Locally based help will also be available from the new bodies that we have set up and those to come. The new Scottish Natural Heritage body is at present being considered in another place. When it begins operations in April 1992, it will have a network of local offices that will enable a sensitive and practical approach to be developed at local level. It will operate in partnership with the many bodies having an interest in the natural heritage, which is a major concern in rural areas. It will create better opportunities for positive action in the use and management of Scotland's natural heritage, and it will seek to promote the sustainable use of that heritage.

In housing, too, Scottish Homes has been active in considering the interests of rural areas. From its beginning, it has adopted a devolved system of offices and a matching system of devolved decision-making. The hon. Gentleman will recall pressing such ideas in Committee on the Bill setting up Scottish Homes. We agreed that this was the way forward. Recently, Scottish Homes published its rural housing strategy, which will be fundamental to matching up housing provision to the needs of the rural community.

I am pleased that we have been able to approve the general thrust of the Scottish Homes' rural housing strategy. I accept that in some areas the scale of need may be such that grants are required on a small scale. I have also been able to approve the proposals for grants to individuals and to make such adjustments as were required to the guidance on planning controls. Further work is required on some of the issues identified during the consultation period, but I am confident that the funds that we were able to provide will mean that there is no delay in beginning action now to improve the housing conditions of many people in rural areas. The Scottish Homes' district plan for the Borders will help identify priorities across the housing spectrum. I am, in particular, pleased that a major central Borders project is under way—the Tweedbank development, which I mentioned previously.

In common with a number of successful Scottish rural areas, the population of the Borders is growing. Between 1971 and 1989, the Borders region grew by 4·7 per cent. while Scotland as a whole showed a reduction in the population of 2·8 per cent. The flight to the cities has been stopped and reversed. Over the same period, the Berwickshire and Tweeddale districts grew by over 11 per cent. People now recognise that life in rural areas has attractions, and not just for "get away from it all" city folk. Happily, local people now tend to stay as opportunities for employment grow and that benefits everyone.

The level of unemployment in the Borders has consistently been well below the rate for Scotland. It peaked in 1987 and now lies at 3·5 per cent. compared with 7·7 per cent. for Scotland as a whole. Within the Borders, rates are as low as 2·9 per cent. in the Galashiels travel-to-work area. After a period of decline, the Borders region has performed much better than many other parts of Scotland, as measured by a range of economic indicators. Borders industries have shown themselves well able to weather downturns and to do so better than their counterparts in more industrialised areas. New industries have come, but the area still depends for much of its prosperity on traditional agriculture, wool textiles and knitwear. The way forward must lie in seeking to build on the base that the traditional industries provide and to diversify, exploiting the natural resources of the area in skills and in the natural heritage.

The twin elements of skills and natural heritage are well used in tourism, which is and will continue to be important to the development of the Borders economy. Many visitors pass through the area, although I acknowledge that a good proportion of them are heading further north. A key aim for the tourist industry must be to entice more of those visitors to stop in the Borders, to stay longer and to spend more. While the natural beauty of the area may be enough for some, others need more facilities and attractions to persuade them to stay. The Scottish Office very much supports the efforts of the Scottish tourist board to encourage new developments with advice and, where necessary, financial assistance. Marketing, too, is essential. I am delighted that the Scottish Borders tourist board, as part of a consortium of southern Scottish tourist boards, recently launched a car touring guide aimed at the European market. I am sure that that initiative, which was supported by the national tourist agencies, will give a significant boost to the number of foreign visitors to the area.

With Europe in mind, I should mention the Government's continuing efforts to secure eligibility of the Borders for European Community support under objective 5(b). We put forward a strong case to the Commission in 1989. It is disappointing that the Commission has not been able to offer a positive response. We shall continue to press the case whenever the opportunity arises for a further review of eligibility.

While tourists appreciate the open roads and scenic routes of the Borders, local people are rightly concerned, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, with local transport. Our bus policy was to promote sustained and fair competition in the interests of the bus user. The hon. Gentleman came to see me on that subject. He will be pleased to hear that the local management-employee buy-out team was successful and that Lowland Scottish Omnibuses Ltd. is locally owned and operated extremely successfully.

Forestry is a major industry in the Borders, and I have said on previous occasions that I believe that it provides many opportunities for invigorating the economy of the Borders. To take best advantage of sometimes remote forests, we have to provide access roads and the Government have been generous to the Borders regional council in giving it substantial enhancements to its capital

allocations for that purpose. Those allocations demonstrate our commitment to providing the quality of roads required for the extraction of timber. The council's programme, as agreed with the Forestry Commission, will be taken fully into account in determining capital consents for future years. Those will, of course, be assessed in light of the overall resources available for allocation.

I shall study the hon. Gentleman's speech with great care. If there are several points that have not been dealt with fully in my response, I shall make sure that I write to him about them.

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 December 1990

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Jamaica

38. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister for Overseas Development next plans to visit Jamaica to discuss third-world deprivation.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans at present to visit Jamaica, but I hope to do so.

Cambodia

40. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for development aid to Cambodia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government are providing humanitarian assistance to Cambodia by supporting the activities of British non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies inside Cambodia and in the camps along the Thai border. We are ready to consider how Cambodia's needs for help with repatriation, reconstruction and development might best be met in the context of a comprehensive political settlement.

Amazon Rain Forests

41. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's participation in the efforts to save the Amazon rain forests.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom is supporting a comprehensive approach towards protection of the Amazonian rain forests both by seeking reforms of the tropical forestry action plan and by helping in specific countries. We already have projects in place in Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia.

Bulgaria

42. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding United Kingdom aid to Bulgaria.

Mrs. Chalker: Bulgaria will become eligible for support from the know-how fund once the new Government have shown their firm commitment to economic and political reform, as we hope they soon will. We are already contributing to humanitarian aid through the Community's PHARE programme. We have encouraged the Commission to consider urgently Bulgarian requests for food assistance.

Hungary

44. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals there are in Hungary to use the know-how funds to assist in the privatisation of industry.

Mrs. Chalker: We have provided two British advisers for the State Property Agency in Hungary, which manages the privatisation process. We are also discussing proposals with their Ministry of Industry for British consultants to assist in restructuring companies prior to their sale.

Sri Lanka

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the items included in the reconstruction work being undertaken in Sri Lanka, to which Her Majesty's Government have pledged £20 million.

Mrs. Chalker: About £11 million of the £20 million reconstruction grant has so far been allocated to the projects listed below. Of this, about £6·5 million has been spent. Implementation of a number of agreed projects, and allocation of the remaining £9 million, has been delayed by the renewed civil conflict.

Completed Projects

40 reconditioned buses for Sri Lanka Transport Board
Rails and fittings for Sri Lanka Railways
Vehicles and road maintenance equipment for the Ministry of Rehabilitation
Equipment for Roads Development Authority's field laboratories

Continuing Projects

Tractors for Ministry of Rehabilitation for use by farmers in Trincomalee district
Equipment for Jaffna university
Equipment for hospitals in Jaffna area
Support for humanitarian and relief activities of British and Sri Lankan NGOs
Furniture and equipment for schools in eastern areas

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the governmental and non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka that received aid from the British Government in 1988 and 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: A wide range of governmental organisations in Sri Lanka benefited from the projects and training financed from our aid programme in the years in question. A complete list could be produced only at disproportionate cost. We also provided direct assistance to one Sri Lankan non-governmental organisation, Sarvodaya, and to a number of British non-governmental organisations operating in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total value of aid given to Sri Lanka; and what proportion is paid to *(a)* governmental agencies and *(b)* non-governmental agencies for 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: Gross British bilateral aid, including capital aid, technical assistance debt relief, assistance under the aid and trade provision emergency aid, joint

funding of non-governmental organisations' projects, and investment by the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) totalled £22 million in 1988 and £23·5 million in 1989.

An exact breakdown of these totals between governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, aid provided through British and Sri Lankan NGOs under our joint funding schemes, from our disaster and refugee unit and bilateral technical assistance programme amounted to about £0·7 million in 1988 and £1·5 million in 1989.

It is not yet possible to provide equivalent figures for 1990.

Third-world Countries (Debt)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning Her Majesty's Government's policy on debt failures by third-world countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have taken the lead in international efforts to provide debt relief for the poorest countries. We are currently seeking the support of other creditors for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent "Trinidad initiative", which would involve a reduction of two thirds in the bilateral debt of the eligible countries.

We welcome the increasing willingness of banks to negotiate reductions in the debt owed to them, mainly by middle-income countries. We support the decision taken last year to allow the IMF and World bank to provide financial support for voluntarily negotiated debt reduction agreements, and are contributing our share of the necessary resources.

Lasting recovery from debt problems will depend on the pursuit of sound economic policies in indebted countries. The Government therefore believe that international assistance should be directed to countries implementing economic reforms.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister for Overseas Development next expects to meet other countries' Ministers to discuss third-world problems, including indebtedness; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I meet regularly with my counterparts from other countries to discuss these issues.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps the Government are taking to improve the energy efficiency of pensioner and low-income households.

Mr. Wakeham: The new home energy efficiency scheme, which will come into operation on 1 January 1991 is aimed specifically at low-income households. Its primary purpose is to increase the take-up of basic energy efficiency measures and to provide advice on ways in which those on low incomes can use energy more efficiently.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Birmingham Pub Bombings

31. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General when a date will be set for the hearing of the appeal of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

35. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects a date to be set for the appeal of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Listing is a matter for the Court of Appeal. Listing of the case can be expected as soon as the grounds for appeal on behalf of six appellants have been lodged and the Crown has had an opportunity to consider them.

May Inquiry

32. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss progress of the May inquiry.

The Attorney-General: I last met the Director of Public Prosecutions on 9 November, when we discussed matters of departmental interest. The subjects discussed on these occasions are not made public.

Legal Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General for the last five years for which figures are available what has been the cost of legal aid for criminal cases in the Crown court *(a)* in total, *(b)* paid to solicitors and *(c)* paid to counsel.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Amounts paid to solicitors	*Amounts paid to counsel*	*Total paid*
1985-86	36·360	38·932	75·292
1986-87	42·601	49·226	91·827
1987-88	47·591	52·494	100·086
1988-89	52·591	66·706	119·297
1989-90	[1]59·193	75·762	134·956

[1] Provisional figures.

Negligence Payments

Mr. Fry: To ask the Attorney-General if he will consider producing guidelines for Her Majesty's judges to allow structured payments to be ordered in cases where damages are awarded to victims of negligence by health authorities.

The Attorney-General: It is for the judiciary themselves to develop guidelines for damages.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receive severe disability premium *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in those departmental

areas covering Islington; and how many people receive income support and attendance allowance but do not receive severe disability premium (i) nationally and (ii) in those departmental areas covering Islington.

Mr. Scott: In May 1989, it is estimated that the severe disability premium was included in the benefit calculation of some 70,000 claimants to income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit. At that time some 187,000 claimants in receipt of income support and attendance allowance did not have the severe disability premium. A number of these people would have been refused the premium because someone was getting invalid care allowance in respect of their care; and special benefit calculation rules apply to certain groups such as people in residential care and nursing homes.

Information for Islington is not available.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received from small business organisations regarding his plans to review statutory sick pay reimbursement regulations.

Mr. Scott: Such representations have been received from the following organisations representing small businesses.

National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses;
National Farmers Union;
The National Chamber of Trade;
The Retail Consortium;
The Union of Independent Companies;
The Electrical Contractors' Association.

Representations have also been received from the Confederation of British Industries and the Employers Engineering Federation, which will have small businesses within their membership.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has estimated the cost to business of moving to 80 per cent. reimbursement of statutory sick pay to business.

Mr. Scott: The proposals in the Statutory Sick Pay Bill reducing the amount of statutory sick pay (SSP) which employers can recover from 100 per cent. to 80 per cent. will produce savings in public expenditure of £181 million in 1991-92, rising to £190 million in 1992-93 and £197 million in 1993-94. In addition, the ending of the additional amount (currently 7 per cent.) which employers can recover as compensation for the national insurance contributions payable on statutory sick pay itself will result in an increase in national insurance income of £71 million, £75 million and £78 million in the three respective years.

My right hon. Friend has also announced reductions in employers' national insurance contributions, which will operate from the same date as the statutory sick pay changes. These are worth some £250 million to employers and have been particularly weighted to help small businesses. They will go a long way towards reducing the extra costs for employers of the statutory sick pay changes and in some cases totally offset them.

The precise effect of the combined statutory sick pay/National Insurance contributions package on individual businesses will depend on the sickness experience and pay levels within their work force, but bearing in mind both the contribution reductions and the fact that most spells of statutory sick pay are over very quickly—the average period is three weeks and 90 per cent. are over within eight weeks—the extra cost for small employers is not expected to be significant.

Attendance and Mobility Allowances

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for each year from 1979 what was the number of awards in payment for the mobility allowance; what was the number of reviews called for by *(a)* the recipient and *(b)* persons other than the recipient; what was the number of such reviews that led to the mobility allowance being withdrawn; and what was the number of such withdrawals as percentages of the number of allowances reviewed and of the total number of allowances in payment.

Mr. Scott: Information on the results of reviews called for by the mobility allowance recipient is not available. Nor is any information on reviews available prior to 1985. The remainder of the information requested is set out in the tables.

Year	*Number of awards in payment*[1]
1979	137,000
1980	185,000
1981	211,000
1982	253,000
1983	302,000
1984	353,000
1985	406,000
1986	461,000
1987	512,000
1988	556,000
1989	599,000

[1] Number of awards in payment current at year end. Figures include awards made under the vehicle scheme beneficiaries regulations.

Year	*Number of reviews called for by recipient*	*Number of reviews called for by persons other than the recipient*
1985	274	173
1986	433	228
1987	350	438
1988	379	412
1989	453	500

Outcome of reviews called for by persons other than the recipient

Number where Mob A withdrawn	*Withdrawn as percentage of reviews*	*Withdrawn as percentage of awards*
120	69·4	0·03
155	68·0	0·03
340	77·6	0·06
299	72·6	0·05
399	79·8	0·07

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for each year from 1979 for *(a)* the attendance allowance at the higher rate and *(b)* the attendance allowance at the lower rate, what was the number of awards in payment; what was the number of reviews called for by (i) the recipient and (ii) persons other than the recipient; how many of each such reviews led to (1) the higher rate attendance allowance being replaced by the

lower rate allowance and (2) the attendance allowance being withdrawn completely; what was the number of such reductions as percentages of the number of allowances reviewed and of the total number of allowances in payment; and what was the number of such complete withdrawals as percentages of the number of allowances reviewed and of the total number of allowances in payment.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available, but such information as is available is in the tables.

Awards of attendance allowance—Table 1

1	[1]2	[1]3	[1]4
Year	*Higher rate*	*Lower rate*	*Total*
1979	123,000	163,000	286,000
1980	132,000	182,000	314,000
1981	147,000	204,000	351,000
1982	150,000	214,000	364,000
1983	177,000	238,000	415,000
1984	192,000	277,000	469,000
1985	222,000	321,000	543,000
1986	237,000	348,000	585,000
1987	259,000	382,000	641,000
1988	286,000	426,000	713,000
1989	311,000	452,000	763,000

[1] Estimated awards in payment at a given time.

All decisions on review—Table 2

1	2	3	4	5	6
Year	*Successful*[1]	*Unsuccessful*	*Total*	*Column 3 as percentage of column 4*	*Column 3 as percentage of column 4 in Table 1*
1979	12,536	4,275	16,811	25·4	1·5
1980	16,288	5,310	21,598	24·4	1·7
1981	14,849	5,967	20,816	28·7	1·7
1982	17,443	7,703	25,146	30·6	2·1
1983	19,819	10,024	29,843	33·6	2·4
1984	23,184	10,190	33,374	30·5	2·2
1985	30,252	10,943	41,195	26·6	2·0
1986	30,492	12,156	42,648	28·5	2·1
1987	44,104	14,169	58,273	24·3	2·2
1988	40,538	15,549	56,087	27·7	2·2
1989	45,778	20,796	66,574	31·2	2·7

[1] A successful review is one where there is a resulting increase in benefit.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what events not set in train by a recipient trigger a review of the attendance and mobility allowances.

Mr. Scott: There may be a review at any time if there is evidence to suggest that a recipient's circumstances have changed.

Mrs. Rosalind Mackworth

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he intends to reappoint Mrs. Rosalind Mackworth as social fund commissioner when her present appointment expires on 30 November.

Mr. Scott: I am pleased that Mrs. Rosalind Mackworth has agreed to continue to serve as social fund commissioner for a period of three years from 1 December 1990. I understand that Mrs. Mackworth has also agreed to act as commissioner for Northern Ireland for the same period.

NATIONAL FINANCE

North Sea Oil

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions the Inland Revenue have had with offshore operators about whether the cost of safety improvements to North sea oil production platforms subsequent to the technical report of the Department of Energy and the Cullen report into the Piper Alpha disaster may be offset by oil companies against petroleum revenue tax.

Mr. Maples: The Inland Revenue has had no discussions with oil industry representatives specifically on the likely tax treatment of future safety improvements made in accordance with these reports.

Privatisation Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras of 23 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *233*, whether in assessing the suitability of firms to act as privatisation advisers he has access to the unpublished reports of the Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Maude: The Treasury is a competent authority for the purposes of the relevant provisions of the Companies Act 1985, and therefore has access to information obtained under that Act. As regards the suitability of firms to act as privatisation advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 November in column 112.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Missing People

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults are known to have gone missing in the Metropolitan police district in each month of the past two years for which records are available; and

how many were subsequently traced (i) within one week, (ii) within one month, (iii) within three months, (iv) within six months and (v) not for over six months of report.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible to give monthly figures in relation to persons reported missing in the Metropolitan police district, and statistical information is not kept regarding the periods of time within which missing persons are traced. However, the following annual figures are given in relation to persons reported missing in the Metropolitan police district in 1988 and 1989.

	1988	*1989*
Males:		
Under 14 years	486	2,955
14 to 17 years	937	5,661
18 years +	2,710	4,566
Females:		
Under 14 years	421	1,587
14 to 17 years	1,091	6,078
18 years +	2,500	4,413
Total	8,145	25,260

Of the 8,145 persons reported missing during 1988, 1,075 were shown centrally as being still missing at the end of the year. Of the 25,260 persons reported missing during 1989, 315 were still missing at the end of the year.

The figures for 1989 are not comparable with those of previous years owing to new recording procedures having been introduced.

Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many inquiries the Metropolitan police received from other forces in respect of missing persons during the last year for which records are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The total number of missing persons reports received by the Metropolitan police from other forces during 1989 was 6,913. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of neighbourhood watch schemes in Wales.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of October 1990, there were estimated to be in the region of 3,450 schemes in Wales, covering over 83,000 households.

Court Psychiatric Schemes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many justices' clerks have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, the recommendations contained in HO circular 66/90 concerning the establishment, together with other local agencies, of court psychiatric assessment arrangements or schemes.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available. We are, however, considering a number of ways in which implementation of the circular's recommendations might be monitored.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will update his answer of 25 October, *Official Report*, columns *262-64*, to list the outstanding cases to October in each category of *(a)* naturalisation, *(b)* registration, *(c)* general immigration casework and *(d)* asylum and related casework.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of outstanding cases relates to casework in B1 and B4 divisions in the immigration and nationality department and is as follows:

Outstanding cases: October

	Number
Naturalisation[1]	63,553
Registration[1]	24,485
General immigration casework[1 2]	20,910
Asylum and related casework[1 3]	29,936

[1] Does not include applications received in the Department but which await allocation to caseworkers.

[2] Includes referred entry clearance applications, and inquiries submitted by letter, as well as variation of leave cases. Includes both general and eastern European casework (the latter was absorbed into general casework in July 1990).

[3] These figures are a total of all work outstanding in the refugee unit.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider amending court regulations in order to broaden the range of people who can speak on behalf of defendants in community charge cases.

Mr. John Patten: Section 22 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 permits a party to any proceedings by a magistrates court to be represented by counsel or a solicitor. In addition, the courts have a discretion to allow someone else to act on behalf of a party. We have no plans to change the law.

House of Lords (Reform)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to reform the House of Lords.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No.

Constitution and Bill of Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals for *(a)* a written constitution and *(b)* a Bill of Rights.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to ensure a separation of powers within the British constitution.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No.

Victim Support Schemes

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the funding of victim support schemes in Greater Manchester, and Stockport in particular.

Mr. John Patten: We have received one letter from the Greater Manchester Federation of Victim Support expressing concern about the proposed withdrawal by local authorities of funding for victim support schemes in Greater Manchester. Home Office grant, which is administered by the funding panel of the national charity Victim Support, stands at £4·5 million this year and will rise by 20 per cent. to £5·4 million next year, subject to parliamentary approval. Local schemes may apply to the funding panel for new or extra grant under criteria reviewed annually, which are designed to ensure that the grant is distributed fairly and to best effect throughout England and Wales.

Helicopters

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he gives to chief constables and to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the circumstances under which it is reasonable to use a helicopter in residential areas *(a)* during the day and *(b)* at night.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Police air operations are subject to safety rules and regulations made under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and enforced by the Civil Aviation Authority. These specify minimum heights and closeness to high objects or buildings at which helicopters may fly over congested areas during the day and at night. Responsibility for the safe operation of police helicopters rests with chief police officers or the companies they employ to provide air services.

Special Constables

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has reached a decision on the introduction of a bounty for special constables.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have decided to authorise pilot projects allowing the payment of a bounty for special constables. This will be subject to amending the Special Constabulary Regulations 1965. Payment of the bounty on an experimental basis will take place in the Metropolitan police district and perhaps two provincial forces to test different types of scheme. The experiment will run for two years initially and its effect on recruitment and retention will be assessed before decisions are taken on the longer-term future of the bounty.

Young Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) further to paragraph 822 of the White Paper, "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", if he will set out his policies with respect to abolition of certification of unruly behaviour;

(2) further to paragraph 822 of the White Paper, "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", if he will place a copy of his consultative document in the Library;

(3) what new proposals he has in respect of young people aged 15 and 16 years in regard to remand and to the provisions of the Bail Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answers 29 and 30 November 1990]:* It remains our intention to publish a consultation paper setting out detailed proposals for reforming the arrangements for the remand of alleged juvenile offenders, including the abolition of the unruliness certification procedure. I shall arrange for a copy of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will make it his policy to create a clear separation at the age of 16 years so that young people aged 16 and 17 years are dealt with by the new youth court but children aged 10 to 16 years are dealt with either by a separate juvenile court or by separate sittings of a youth court;

(2) what is his latest policy for setting the lower age limit in respect of young people being brought before the proposed youth courts;

(3) whether he will make it his policy that magistrates' courts should so structure their operations as to deal separately with children aged under 14 years and those who are aged 14-plus.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 29 and 30 November 1990]:* The jurisdiction of the proposed youth court, to be introduced by the Criminal Justice Bill, will include young people aged 10 to 17 inclusive who are charged with criminal offences. Within each youth court listing arrangements will be a matter for the justices' clerk to determine.

Democratic Accountability

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals Her Majesty's Government have *(a)* to increase democratic accountability to Parliament and *(b)* to improve the facilities available to hon. Members better to carry out their duties.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: If the hon. Gentleman has any specific points or proposals for improvement in mind, the Government will, as always, be happy to consider them.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Conservation Grants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been allocated for the farm conservation grant scheme for *(a)* 1989-90, *(b)* 1990-91 and *(c)* 1991-92; how much has been taken up in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In England for the 1989-90 financial year, £9 million was allocated for the farm and conservation grant scheme and £6,029,000 was spent. For the 1990-91 financial year, £23,230,000 was allocated and expenditure to the end of October was £10,821,000. Expenditure in the latter half of the financial year is traditionally higher than in the first half and we do not expect a significant underspend this year. The planned allocation for 1991-92 is £22,926,000.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether grant aid is available under the farm conservation grant scheme to cover the costs incurred as a result of reinforcement of the electricity supply due to the installation of new pollution control equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No, these grants are targeted on equipment to treat, handle and store waste. The very

generous 50 per cent. grant is higher than the EC norm and was only approved by the EC Commission because it did not cover ancillary items. A widening of the grant would therefore have to be offset by a cut in grant rates or withdrawal of grant from other farm waste investments.

Coast Protection Act

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now make it his policy to undertake a review into the workings of the Coast Protection Act 1949.

Mr. Curry: I have no plans to undertake a review into the workings of the Coast Protection Act 1949.

Food Irradiation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to lay the regulations which will allow the introduction of food irradiation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I intend to lay the Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990 before Parliament later this month. The regulations will lift the current general prohibition on the sale of irradiated foods in Great Britain and introduce a licensing system for food treatment facilities.

Fish Farms

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the studies which have associated the growth of each blue/green algae with nutrient-rich waters resulting from fish farm wastes.

Mr. Curry: This Department is aware of no studies which link the growth of blue-green algae with nutrient-rich waters resulting specifically from fish farm wastes.

Foxes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received the copy of the research undertaken at the university of Aberdeen into lamb predation by foxes which has been sent to him; and if he intends to respond to this report.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is considering the report with a view to deciding how he might respond to it.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nursery Education

Hilary Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the average cost of a place in *(a)* a nursery school, *(b)* a nursery class and *(c)* a reception class for four-year-olds.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not collected centrally. Local authority expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment do not identify separate figures for the education of under-fives. A single set of figures is returned covering all nursery and primary provision.

Supercomputing

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to ensure that there will be no reduction in the number of supercomputing centres now available for British academic research, when responsibilities for these facilities are transferred to the Advisory Body for the Research Councils in April 1991.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our general policy is at least to maintain the current overall level of national supercomputing services. The number of centres to provide these services will, in the normal way, remain a matter for review from time to time.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether the Government are planning to expand supercomputing facilities available to British academic research to the levels available to researchers in France and Italy;

(2) what plans he has for supercomputing expansion programmes similar to those being pursued in *(a)* West Germany, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Japan, respectively.

Mr. Alan Howarth: From 1 April 1991, responsibility for national supercomputing facilities for research council and HEI research will transfer to the research council system. My right hon. and learned Friend is awaiting the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the allocation of the science budget, which was announced on 8 November.

Teachers

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what machinery is to be put in place to ensure that differentials are maintained between head teachers and deputies and other teaching staff.

Mr. Eggar: The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill, which is currently before the House, envisages the establishment of a separate sub-committee to consider the pay and other conditions of service of head teachers and deputy head teachers.

Battersea Park CTC

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much *(a)* Government money, *(b)* money from sponsors and *(c)* capital from Wandsworth council will be put into the Battersea Park voluntary-aided city technology college.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is aware of the very interesting proposal from Wandsworth for a voluntary-aided school with the characteristics of a city technology college. If confirmed by the council, this would come to him for decision under sections 12 and 13 of the 1980 Education Act, and would be considered on its merits. He would also need to consider any application for Government funding which might come from the LEA and the promoters of the proposal.

ADT City Technology College

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what direction he gave the London residuary body as to disposal of the site for the ADT city technology

college in Wandsworth; what was the valuation of the site; and what provision has been made to compensate inner London boroughs for the loss of their proportion of the capital value of the site that has been transferred to the ADT city technology college.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has given no direction to the LRB as to the disposal of this site. The LRB valued the site for educational purposes, and on that basis leased it to ADT. The valuation is confidential commercial information. The receipts from the lease will be used for the benefit of all the inner London councils.

Wandsworth Boys School

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what direction he proposes to give the London residuary body as to release of the site of the former Wandsworth boys' school in Sutherland grove, Wandsworth; and what provision will be made to compensate inner London boroughs for the loss of their proportion of the capital value of the site.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has directed the LRB to hold Sutherland grove pending proposals to establish a new Church of England school under section 13 of the Education Act 1980. These proposals would require the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend. If the proposals were approved the site would be sold at educational value by the LRB to the governors of the school. If the proposals were not approved, or if proposals were not brought forward, the site would be sold by the LRB at full commercial value. In either case, the receipts would be used to benefit all the inner London councils.

Pensions Branch, Darlington

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy that any arrangements considered regarding agency status for the pensions branch in Darlington will preclude moving the facility from Darlington.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In keeping with Government policy on relocation, and our policy that the Departments' main offices should be located only in London or Darlington, it is our expectation that, if a pensions agency were to be established, it would remain in Darlington. Location is one of a range of matters that would fall to be addressed in the development of any framework document for an agency.

Higher Education

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what number and percentage of the total of students in higher education attended private schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department's survey of leavers from English schools in academic year 1988-89 indicates that approximately one quarter of pupils whose intended destination on leaving school was full-time higher education were attending independent schools.

Evidence from the youth cohort study also indicated that some 25 per cent. of 18-year-olds in higher education had attended independent schools.

Information published by UCCA shows that there were nearly 16 thousand students accepted for entry at United Kingdom universities in autumn 1989 from independent schools in England and Wales.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average cost of a place in higher education.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Available recurrent public funding per full-time equivalent home student in the Universities Funding Council and Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council sectors is planned at £5,320 for the 1991-92 financial year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Technology Group

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give outline approval to the exhibition in the Upper Waiting Corridor on the work and achievements of the British technology group as requested in a letter to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) from the hon. Member for South Hams.

Mr. Leigh: My noble Friend the Minister for Industry has written to the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) indicating his agreement to balloting for this purpose.

Economic League

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will prosecute the Economic League for failing to file an up-to-date set of annual reports and accounts as required by sections 242 and 244 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: Economic League Ltd. is currently filed up-to-date. The last accounts filed cover the period ended 31 December 1989. Accounts for the period ending 31 December 1990 will become due on 1 November 1991.

Rigidized Metals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will prosecute the directors of Rigidized Metals for failure to file up-to-date accounts as required by sections 242 and 244 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: Rigidized Metals Ltd. has failed to submit accounts for the period ended 31 August 1989. The registrar has confirmed that the company has been notified of the default and appropriate action is being taken to secure compliance.

Foreign Currency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for consultation with the Institute of Chartered Accountants about SSAP 20 on foreign currency transactions.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* None. The requirements of SSAP 20 are a matter for the Accounting Standards Board.

Polly Peck

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from Mr. Gottfried Hofmann or the English Institute of Chartered Accountants on the operation of SSAP 20 and its effects on Polly Peck's reporting of overseas transactions.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* None, so far as I am aware.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what check is made on the accounts and positions of companies which lodge their accounts late at Companies house.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* Companies house carries out certain basic checks on all accounts lodged with it, but the contents are not scrutinised in detail except in response to specific complaints. Companies house takes various steps to pursue companies which have failed to submit accounts on time.

Fiveoaks Investments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to investigate the latest published accounts of Fiveoaks Investments for failure to comply with SSAP 6.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* No. Compliance with accounting standards is a matter for the accountancy profession pending the establishment of the review panel under the aegis of the Financial Reporting Council.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Republic of Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the views expressed concerning Northern Ireland's relationship with the Republic of Ireland by Mr. Serrard Cowper-Coles, the first secretary at the British embassy in Washington, at the Boston Investor Responsibility Research Centre, represents Government policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) on 29 November 1990 at column 456.

El Salvador

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what continuing interest is maintained by Her Majesty's Government into the investigation by the authorities in El Salvador into the murder of Jesuit priests; whether he anticipates any further direct assistance by representatives of Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have repeatedly made clear to the Salvadorean Government the need to bring the investigation to a successful conclusion and the murderers to justice. We hope that New Scotland Yard's report, which has now been handed over, will help them to do so. We and our EC partners re-emphasised our concern in a joint statement on the anniversary of the murders on 16 November.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Salvadorean authorities have given any commitment to make available the results of the investigation of the murder of Jesuit priests; and when he expects that the inquiry will report.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The investigation is being conducted by a judge according to the Salvadorean legal process. It is not yet clear when the case will come to trial.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Health Council will meet on 3 December to discuss the Commission's proposals for partial harmonisation of rules governing the advertising of tobacco, the European Year of Nutrition in 1994 and for Community action against drug abuse in sport. Ministers will also discuss a request for greater involvement in proposals connected with food safety. Further action in the areas of drug abuse and AIDS will be considered and the Council may also discuss proposals for improving the prevention and treatment of acute human poisoning. Statements are expected to be made by the Commission on the institution of a committee on health protection, co-operation between the EC and the WHO and progress on biomedical research. The Presidency will put forward communications on action in the field of pharmaceuticals in the Internal Market Council and the proposals for the elderly which were discussed in the Social Affairs Council on 26 November. Proposals for an exchange of information on cardiovascular disease are expected to be taken as an "A" point.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 3 December to discuss the directive on money laundering; further work on economic and monetary union in preparation for the forthcoming inter-governmental conference; and the proposed revisions of the financial perspective as a result of German unification and the Gulf crisis. Ministers will also consider the Commission's proposal for a transitional VAT system after 1992, and in particular the VAT control compromise proposal. Tax harmonisation in the road transport sector will also be considered, and there will be a discussion, with a view to reaching agreement, on provisions relating to off-market trading and the access of banks to exchanges.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 4 December to look at the preparations for the intergovernmental conferences (IGCs) on economic and monetary union and on political union and will take the procedural decision to convene the IGCs. Ministers will also discuss preparations for the European Council, which will include a discussion of assistance to the Soviet Union and possibly of EC aid to eastern Europe. The Council will review progress in the negotiations with EFTA countries on the European economic area, and will consider further the implications of German unification. There will be discussions of a

Commission statement on the occupied territories, of the generalised scheme of preferences (GSP) for 1991 and of the media programme. Ministers are also likely to discuss reports on immigration policy in member states and the social integration of immigrants. Under other business there is likely to be a discussion of ACP debt, and there will be the nomination of President and Vice-Presidents of the Commission at a conference of member states.

At the Education Council on 6 December, Ministers are likely to discuss the Eurydice network, the role of education in the fight against drugs and Community co-operation in the evaluation of education systems. The Council may also consider the governing status of European schools, and the non-university sector of post-secondary schools.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 10 and 11 December and will discuss the agricultural aspects of the GATT round, GATT beef import quotas and the review of the sugar regime. Other items which may be discussed are the common organisation of the market in oils and fats, table olives, aromatic wines, revisions to regulation 797/85 concerning agriculture and the environment, costs of CAP information across the Community, the report on inter-professional organisations and the welfare of pigs and calves.

At the Consumer and Internal Market Council on 13 December Ministers will consider a number of measures relevant to the completion of the single market, and a proposal for a regulation to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. Ministers will also discuss a proposal for a general product safety directive on which the Presidency hopes to achieve further progress on the key outstanding issues, although there are still a number of differences to be resolved. There is also likely to be an oral presentation by the Commission on the proposal for a directive on the liability for services with a safety defect.

At a meeting of the Telecommunications Council on 14 December, Ministers will consider a proposal for a Council resolution on the final phase of implementation of the co-ordinated introduction of the pan-European digital cellular communications system (GSM). There will be an orientation debate on the role of telecommunications in EC relations with the countries of eastern and central Europe, which may result in Council conclusions. The Commission will present a proposal for a Council decision on a second phase of the EC programme TEDIS and a communication on EDI. As this agenda item is to be no more than a presentation there will be no Council conclusions. The Council will also have the first opportunity to debate the final version of the Commission's Green Paper on a common approach in the field of satellite communications in the European Community which was adopted by the Commission on 14 November. There will be an orientation debate which may result in Council conclusions. The Council may also be expected to agree a recommendation on the co-ordinated introduction of digital European cordless telecommunications in the Community and to agree a common position on a directive on the frequency bands to be reserved for them.

The European Council will meet in Rome on 14 and 15 December. Heads of Government are likely to discuss the forthcoming intergovernmental conference on political union, the current crisis in the Gulf and assistance to the Soviet Union. There is also likely to be a discussion of the single market and perhaps of the siting of the instituions. Heads of Government may consider economic and monetary union, GATT, EC/EFTA negotiations and EC/Mediterranean policy.

The Economic and Finance Council on 17 December is expected to discuss the Commission's proposals for extending European Investment Bank operations to Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, with a Community guarantee, and may also discuss the disbursement of the medium-term loan to Hungary. Ministers will discuss the Commission's proposal for a transitional VAT system, and may also consider the Commission's proposal for the control of the movements of excise goods post-1992, which was presented at the October Economic and Finance Council.

The Transport Council will meet on 17 to 18 December and is expected to discuss proposals on the dimensions of road trains, combined transport, shipping cabotage, various aspects of the aviation industry, and road haulage quotas and crisis measures. There will be orientation debates on shipping consortia and the transfer of vessels between Community registers, and some discussion of transit through third countries. Infrastructure cost coverage, high-speed rail networks and the impact of German unification may also feature on the agenda.

There will be a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 18 December to discuss follow-up to the European Council. Ministers will also discuss the Community position for the co-operation council with Egypt which will take place in the margins, and will discuss draft negotiating mandates for association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Council will have a further discussion of the Commission's proposals for a new Mediterranean policy, and will discuss the Commission's proposals for a new (third) EC/Yugoslavia financial protocol, and will also consider the Commission's proposals for strengthening EC/Turkey relations. Ministers will also discuss the aid programme for Asia and Latin America, and may consider EC relations with San Marino and the GATT Uruguay round.

The Fisheries Council will meet on 19 December to discuss total allowable catches for 1991 including arrangements with third countries, tariff quotas for 1991, the amendment of the structural regulation and technical conservation measures.

The Environment Council scheduled for 20 and 21 December will consider proposals for directives on the treatment of municipal waste water (sewage discharges), on the management of hazardous waste, on motor vehicle emissions and on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances. Proposed Council regulations on an action programme to protect the Mediterranean (MEDSPA) and on substances that deplete the ozone layer will also be considered. It is possible that the Council will hold further discussions on the use of economic and fiscal instruments to attain environmental objectives.

The Research Council will meet on 21 December and will discuss the Presidency's suggestion of informal meetings of Research Ministers. It is possible that common positions will be agreed on the environment, marine technology and telematics programmes under the third framework programme. The Council will consider the EC's role in the next phase of the international thermonuclear experimental reactor (ITER) programme.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what subjects, including security, are under discussion by the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference secretariat at Maryfield.

Mr. Brooke: It has not been the practice to make public details of discussions in the Anglo-Irish secretariat, in common with the confidentiality usual in discussions between Governments.

Rural Development

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will give details of the funding arrangements for the interdepartmental committee for rural development;

(2) if he has plans to establish a permanent body responsible for rural development in Northern Ireland;

(3) if he will give details of the composition of the interdepartmental committee for rural development established in Northern Ireland in 1989;

(4) if he will give details of the terms of reference of the interdepartmental committee for rural development established in Northern Ireland in 1989;

(5) if he will give details of the work *(a)* carried out to date and *(b)* to be carried out by the interdepartmental committee for rural development established in Northern Ireland in 1989.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The interdepartmental committee on rural development is chaired by the permanent secretary of the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. Its members are drawn from the six Northern Ireland Government Departments and from other statutory agencies with an interest in rural matters including the Industrial Development Board, the Local Enterprise Development Unit, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The Committee's terms of reference are :

- to continue the work started by the earlier interdepartmental group, maintaining an overview of Government policies and programmes in the most deprived rural areas of Northern Ireland in order to maximise the impact of existing expenditure;
- to consider appropriate area sensitivity and improved co-ordination at local level in the application of mainline Departmental programmes;
- to consider and develop appropriate responses to the conclusions put forward by the rural action project and other relevant reports; and
- to monitor and evaluate measures initiated.

In pursuit of its remit, the committee has held discussions with district councils, the rural action project, promoters of rural development projects and other rural interests. An early decision, following a recommendation from the Committee, was to fund the rural action project for a further year to 31 March 1991. Some £0·25 million has been allocated to the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland in the current financial year to meet these costs and to provide assistance to voluntary bodies engaged in activities designed to identify the needs of, and means of assisting, deprived rural areas. The costs of secretarial support to the Committee and other associated overheads have been borne by the Department from existing resources.

The Committee has now completed its work and expects to report in the very near future. It is not possible at this stage to anticipate either the report's recommendations or the decisions which will follow. Although it is not intended to publish the report, decisions flowing from it will be announced as appropriate.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake an immediate and fundamental review of the poll tax.

Mr. Portillo: We shall shortly start a careful review of the community charge.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding delays in the processing of community charge and benefit payments within the North Devon district council area; and if he will offer assistance with clearing the backlog.

Mr. Key: I have received a number of representations. It is the responsibility of each charging authority to ensure the effective administration of the community charge. However, in order to assist charging authorities in the introduction of the community charge, the Government made provision of £110 million for expenditure on implementation in the rate support grant settlement for 1989-90. £55 million of this was supported by way of specific grant; the rest formed part of block grant. For 1990-91 we have taken account of the cost to charging authorities of collecting the community charge in the other services block standard spending assessment, and the cost is therefore being supported through the revenue support grant settlement.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much national non-domestic rate has been collected; and how much has been *(a)* distributed to local councils and *(b)* retained within the Treasury.

Mr. Key: The amount of national non-domestic rates due to be paid into the central pool for England in 1990-91 by local authorities, by ratepayers on the central list and through Crown contributions in lieu of rates is £10,743·5 million. This is £315 million more than the amount paid to authorities in 1990-91 in the distributable amount of national non-domestic rates (£10,428·5 million).

The arrangements for setting the distributable amount ensure that, taking one year with another, local authorities receive in full the amount which is paid into the pool. The proposed distributable amount for 1991-92 of £12,408 million takes full account of the £385 million by which the yield of non-domestic rates during 1990-91 is likely to exceed the distributable amount for 1990-91. This comprises the £315 million surplus paid into the pool during 1990-91 and an estimated £70 million which is the net payment that local authorities are expected to make to the pool in autumn 1991 after adjustments to reflect the amount of rates actually collectable from businesses in 1990-91.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much Government grant to local

authorities would have to rise to prevent any wage bill-related rise in the 1991 poll tax bills, using his Department's assumption of rising wage costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: My Department has made no particular assumption about rising pay costs in 1991. However, the amount of external financial support to be distributed to local authorities in 1991-92 will be 12·8 per cent. higher than in 1990-91.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will now announce the terms and timescale of his review of the poll tax;

(2) whether he will immediately exempt those on the lowest incomes from the liability for 20 per cent. of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will now abolish the poll tax;

(4) whether his review of the poll tax will include measures to relate the tax to the ability to pay; and if he will make a statement;

(5) whether his review of the poll tax will include measures to relate the tax directly to income; and if he will make a statement;

(6) whether he now intends to end the double charge of poll tax and the unified business rate on those small businesses where the owner lives on the premises; and if he will make a statement;

(7) whether his review of the poll tax will be cash limited; and if he will make a statement;

(8) whether his review of the poll tax will encompass any transfer of services currently funded and controlled at local authority level to central Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend is just starting a careful review of the community charge. It is premature to speculate on what possibilities he might look at in detail, or when any changes might take effect.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities who have commenced court proceedings to seek liability orders against those who have not paid the poll tax at the latest available date; and what proportion this is of the total number of authorities.

Mr. Key: The Department does not have this information.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now seek to repeal that section of the poll tax legislation covering the capping of local authority budgets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No.

Formaldehyde

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment from what date he means to fix the emission level for formaldehyde production at 2mg/m^3; and what staff resources will be devoted to policing this limit.

Mr. Trippier: Guidance will be issued to local authorities early next year, under part I of the Environmental Protection Act, on appropriate standards of air pollution control from chipboard manufacturing plant. Responses to the recent consultation on the final draft of that guidance, which proposed an emission limit of 2mg/m^3 for formaldehyde, are currently being considered.

Responsibility for exercising control over chipboard processes will rest with local authorities, who will be able to recover the reasonable costs of exercising their new air pollution control functions under a charging scheme being drawn up under section 8 of the Act.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the buildings on which he has served a section 54 notice concerning the preservation of historic buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Under section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, previously section 101 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, a local planning authority may, after service of a notice, execute any works which appear to them to be urgently necessary for the preservation of unoccupied (or unoccupied parts) of a listed building; and section 55 provides for recovery of expenses. In Greater London, these powers are also available to English Heritage.

In addition, the Secretary of State has the power to serve a notice under section 54. Since 1 April 1984 this power has had to be exercised through English Heritage, who serve the notice when authorised to do so by the Secretary of State and carry out the works on his behalf.

The Secretary of State served a notice under section 101 of the 1971 Act in 1981 in respect of the grade I listed Barlaston hall, Staffordshire, and in 1987 he authorised English Heritage to serve a section 101 notice in respect of the grade I listed Revesby abbey, Lincolnshire.

Successive Secretaries of State have made it clear that they would serve or authorise the service of a section 54 notice only where the building concerned is of exceptional interest.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the total Government expenditure on the upkeep, care and protection of historic buildings and monuments in England in each year since 1980.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* Government funding for the upkeep, care and protection of historic buildings and monuments in England (and for the protection and promotion of the heritage generally) is channelled through a number of non-departmental public bodies, agencies and departmental programmes. The main ones are English Heritage (established in 1984), the National Heritage Memorial Fund (established in 1980), the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, the Historic Royal Palaces Agency (established in 1989), and the royal parks and royal palaces programme.

The total allocation of resources to the full range of agencies and programmes supported by the Department has risen from about £55 million net in 1980-81 to a planned budget of £173·6 million in 1991-92. Not all these resources are spent on historic buildings and monuments, and there have been a number of changes in policy, organisation and responsibilities since 1980 which preclude direct comparisons between Government expenditure on buildings and monuments over the last 10 years. However, the main source of support for this

category of the heritage are the repair grant schemes run directly by the Department prior to 1984 and by English Heritage thereafter. Expenditure on these schemes was £12 million in 1979, against English Heritage's planned budget of £35 million in 1991-92 which includes provision for the new grant scheme to assist repairs to historic cathedrals. Additionally, English Heritage owns or manages on behalf of the state over 400 properties and sites, on which about £25 million net expenditure is planned in 1991-92. The Historic Royal Palaces Agency's planned net expenditure in 1991-92 is £9·3 million and planned net expenditure on the occupied royal palaces, other historic buildings and state ceremonial in that year is £30·8 million.

Highcliffe Castle

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his discussions with English Heritage concerning the future of Highcliffe castle, Dorset.

Mr. Trippier: English Heritage has been in discussion with Christchurch borough council (which is the owner of the grade I listed Highcliffe castle as well as being the local planning authority) with the aim of securing the repair of the building and a beneficial use for it in the future. The Department has been kept in touch with the progress of these discussions.

I understand that English Heritage has offered grant aid of up to £200,000 to the council towards the cost of urgent repairs to the building. The authority has accepted this offer and work is expected to begin shortly.

English Heritage has made it clear to the council that if repairs are not carried out it will ask the Secretary of State to use his powers under section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to authorise English Heritage itself to carry out the works. I cannot of course prejudge my right hon. Friend's decision if he should be asked to take this step, but he would consider the case very carefully in the light of the circumstances.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from the Housing Corporation identifying *(a)* the areas of the country where its overspend occurred and *(b)* which of the additional units completed are located in the 57 stress areas.

Sir George Young: This is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have therefore asked the corporation to respond to the hon. Member direct.

Statisticians

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statisticians are employed in his Department; and how many are responsible for local authority statistics.

Mr. Key: Forty-two statisticians of all grades are employed in my Department, including one part-time and three whose appointments are on a temporary basis. Of these, 25 have some responsibilities for local authority statistics, amounting in total to the equivalent of 18 full-time posts.

Local Authorities (Investigation)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities his Department is investigating under part I of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Portillo: As I indicated in my answer of 21 November 1990, at column *144*, my Department is currently investigating complaints of alleged anti-competitive behaviour under part I of the Local Government Act 1988 in the case of 48 local authorities. It is not my policy to publish the names of authorities while actions are under investigation. Authorities are named in cases where the Secretary of State makes a direction under section 14 of the 1988 Act.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will revise his Department's standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend is at present considering the many representations which have been received from local authority representatives about their standard spending assessments during the period of consultation on the proposals for revenue support grant in 1991-92. He will announce his decisions on the 1991-92 settlement shortly.

School Caretakers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he plans to include school caretakers in the scope of compulsory competitive tendering under the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Portillo: Building cleaning work undertaken by a school caretaker is already subject to compulsory competitive tendering unless it is only incidental to the major part of his duties or he lives in tied accommodation. There are no plans to introduce competition for other work undertaken by school caretakers.

Land Registration

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 19 November, *Official Report*, column *39*, if he will state the definition of the term "underused land", as distinct from used or unused land.

Sir George Young: The code of practice, which was referred to in the previous answer and which is annexed to DOE circular 18/89, includes a definition of "underused land." However, the criteria for entry on the statutory registers proposed in the recent consultation paper "Encouraging the use of vacant public sector land", including the criterion relating to underused land, would be the subject of separate consultations in due course.

East Newcastle Quayside

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is willing to consider alternative proposals to the Godfrey Bradman scheme for the redevelopment of east Newcastle quayside that are acceptable to the principal objectors to the Bradman scheme.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The Tyne and Wear development corporation considered a number of proposals before developing its preferred option. It is for the development corporation to consider any new proposals which might be put to it.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the principal shareholders in the company chosen by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation to develop the east quayside site in Newcastle; and how much public money is to be invested in the project.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The selection of a preferred developer, and matters relating to that development, are the responsibility of the Tyne and Wear development corporation. No decision has yet been taken by Government on the total amount of public money which might be provided for the east quayside project.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest timetable for the development of the east Newcastle quayside; when the project was first announced; and how much building work has been carried out to date.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The timetable for development is a matter for Tyne and Wear development corporation and the developer jointly to determine. The announcement of the selection of a preferred scheme was made in September 1988. The following works have been carried out on the site to date: demolition of dangerous buildings and walls, removal of Ballast Hill and retaining wall, excavation of old foundations and cleaning out of underground pitch tunnel, clearance of pigeon loft site, and archaeological excavation works.

Spencer House

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if any official bookings have been made by Government Departments in respect of Spencer house.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 November 1990]:* My Department has made no such bookings. Any bookings which may have been made by other Departments are a matter for my right hon. Friends.

TRANSPORT

Environmental Impact Assessments

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all road schemes which have had their line orders confirmed since 21 July 1988, and for which no environmental impact assessment study has been conducted.

Mr. Chope: All schemes in the national trunk road programme have for many years been subject to a very full environmental appraisal before the line orders are confirmed. Within the requirements of the EC directive, a formal environmental statement has accompanied all draft orders published since 21 July 1988. Those for which line orders were confirmed since that date but which did not fall within the requirements of the directive are as follows:

M3 Bar End—Compton
A1 Bramham—Wetherby
A1 Wetherby—Dishforth
A1 Gatenby lane, Leeming
A1 Tempsford overbridge scheme
A3 Liphook—Ham Barn part 2
A3 Milford bypass
A6 Burton Latimer bypass
A6 Black Lodge improvement
A5/A49 Telford—Shrewsbury
A6 (M) Stockport north/south bypass
A10 Brandon Creek—Southery
A12 Gorleston relief road
A12 Capel St. Mary grade separated junction
A16 Louth bypass
A16 Ludborough bypass
A20 Dawkinge Wood—Court Wood
A20 Court Wood—Dover
A30 Penhale—Carland Cross
A30 Plusha—Bolventor
A30 Zelah bypass
A34 Newbury bypass
A35 Yellowham Hill—Troytown
A38 Marsh Mills grade separated junction
A39 Fairy Cross—Horns Cross
A41 Berkhamstead and King's Langley bypasses
A43 Blisworth bypass
A46 East Norton bypass
A47 Etling Green junction improvement
A47 Narborough bypass
A49 Weaverham diversion
A59 Mellor Brook bypass
A65 Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass
A65 Draughton bypass
A140 Dickleburgh bypass
A303 Chicklade Bottom to Stockton Wood
A303 Mere Wincanton improvement
A406 Popes lane to Western avenue improvement
A406 Silver street to Hall lane improvement
A406 East London river crossing
A500 Nantwich bypass
A516 Etwall bypass
A568 Widnes eastern bypass
A590 Dalton-in-Furness
A595 Egremont bypass
A595 Hensingham bypass
A596 Wigton bypass
A650 Drighlington bypass
A1079 Market Weighton bypass

Parking Restrictions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to prohibit *(a)* the levying of charges and *(b)* the clamping of cars by private companies employed to enforce parking restrictions.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) on 22 November 1990 at column *169*.

British Rail (Surplus Land)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his Department's instructions to British Rail relating to the disposal of surplus land as part of the annual negotiations on the external financing limit specifically to separate the rules applying to actual trackbed as opposed to other land holdings; and when these instructions were last reviewed.

Mr. Freeman: The policies that the Government look for in the handling of British Rail land were last restated to BR in September 1985. They require, among other things, that the board should make a commercial plan for

identifying and divesting itself of all its underused or surplus property. There are no plans to review these instructions, which are not linked to the annual negotiations on the external financing limit. Before deciding whether to declare disused trackbeds non-operational and subject to disposal, BR takes account of possible future operational needs and consults widely local authorities and other appropriate organisations.

Rail Electrification, Yorkshire

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce a decision concerning loan approval for the electrification of rail services in West Yorkshire, including the Bradford-Leeds railway.

Mr. Freeman: As I informed the House on 26 November, the Government are reserving the appropriate resources to enable the electrification of this railway line.

A127

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the target date for the completion of the works at Rayleigh Weir on the A127; what is the likely completion date; and what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the works are completed on schedule.

Mr. Chope: I refer to the reply that I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) about Rayleigh Weir underpass 30 November 1990 at column *492*.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the debt on the Severn bridge in 1989;

(2) how much the accumulated debt on the Severn bridge is at the latest available date.

Mr. Chope: The debt to the Consolidated Fund at 31 March 1989 was £113,376,084. For 31 March 1990 it is estimated to be £133 million.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the estimated completion date for the current renovation and maintenance work on the Severn bridge;

(2) what items of repair and renovation have been completed on the Severn bridge in the last 12 months;

(3) what work is currently under way on the Severn bridge;

(4) what is the current projected cost of the repair and maintenance work on the Severn bridge;

(5) what is the nature of work still to be done on the Severn bridge;

(6) what is the estimated final cost of repair work likely to be on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Chope: The contract for the main strengthening work was substantially completed in April. The resurfacing contract (which includes wind barriers at the towers and safety fence work) is due for completion late next summer. Certain other minor works, including painting, are also still in progress.

The estimated cost of the repair and strengthening work is £80 million.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was collected in 1989 in tolls on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Chope: Income from tolls in the financial year 1989-90 was £13,609,424.

Manchester to London Rail Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the number of train journeys which are significantly delayed due to mechanical problems on the Manchester to London service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department does not hold this information. This is a commercial matter for British Rail.

Humber Bridge Authority

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about his discussions with the Humber Bridge Authority concerning the settlement of its debt.

Mr. Chope: The Humber Bridge Board has presented a case for the write-off of some of its debt. This is being given careful consideration.

Mersey Tunnel

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current debt on the Mersey tunnel.

Mr. Chope: The debt at 31 March 1990 was £116 million.

M1

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make arrangements for the provision of tourist signs on the M1 motorway indicating directions to the Yorkshire mining museum at Gaphouse colliery, Overton, near Wakefield.

Mr. Chope: Tourist signs on motorways can be provided for attractions which meet criteria agreed between the Department of Transport and the tourist boards. The cost of such signs is met by the operator of the tourist attraction.

M25

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish new plans for improving the M25.

Mr. Rifkind: I have today published an action plan for the M25 which carries forward a number of proposals for easing congestion on the M25 by enhancing its capacity and smoothing traffic flows.

My Department is pressing ahead with the plans announced in the May 1989 Roads White Paper for widening the whole of the M25 to four lanes. The consultants will also investigate longer-term options such as climbing lanes, widening to five lanes and the provision of collector-distributor roads alongside the motorway. My Department will continue to examine the options for making full use of the existing carriageway.

The plan contains a number of important traffic management measures to assist drivers and improve safety and traffic flows. These include lighting the motorway, improved signalling through the use of automatic incident detection in conjunction with new variable message signs, and improved arrangements for smoothing the flow of traffic at junctions—including the use of access control where appropriate.

I am sure this plan will be welcomed by many users of the M25 and by communities that have been relieved of traffic by the M25.

Motorway Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department ensures cost-effectiveness in motorway surface maintenance contracts where he does not open up contracts to competitive bidding by public and private sector organisations.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* We keep under review the general orders of cost of agent authorities and consultants in managing maintenance. In those areas where we use consultants we are satisfied that the arrangement gives value for money. Competition between consultants for commissions is the main discipline for ensuring this.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will list by each motorway section in England and Wales the names of companies and organisations holding contracts for surface maintenance, giving details of when they were made, when they are due to expire, the value of each contract and indicating those whose renewal will be decided by competitive tender.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* The following are details of current commissions for managing motorway maintenance. All will expire on 31 March next year, and competitions are in progress for new commissions. Elsewhere maintenance of motorways is currently managed by local highway authorities acting as our agents.

Details of commissions

Commission and consultant	*Start date*	*Approximate value £ million/year*
Greater Manchester		
Parkman	1 April 1986	25
South Yorkshire		
Sir Owen Williams and Partners	1 April 1986	10
West Yorkshire		
Frank Graham and Partners	1 April 1986	29
Midland Links		
Atkins/Maunsell joint venture	1 April 1987	13

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what grounds he refused to allow Birmingham city council to bid for the contract as agent for his Department in the maintenance of the midlands link motorway.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy to allow Birmingham city council and any interested and qualified private sector consultants competitively to bid for the contract for surface maintenance of the midlands link motorway from junction 5 to near junction 9 on the M6 and to near junction 2 on the M5 when the present contract comes up for renewal.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* There is no legal basis on which a local authority can compete with consultants for motorway maintenance commissions. Consultants have already been managing these sections of motorway. In view of the success of this arrangement we are currently holding a further competition to appoint consultants when the present commission expires next year. This approach accords with Government policy of contracting work out to the private sector wherever this is consistent with sound management and obtaining value for money.

HEALTH

Military Medical Requirements

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions have been given to national health service burns and plastic surgery units as a result of possible conflict in the Gulf, with particular regard to the treatment of victims suffering from chemical, biological and nuclear-related injuries.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance for clinicians on the handling of various categories of military casualty, should the need arise, is in preparation.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions have been made for United States military casualties by United Kingdom civilian health facilities in the event of war.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the joint Department of Health and Ministry of Defence planning group guidance to regional health authorities on the reception and allocation arrangements for armed forces to the national health service in war.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to whom guidelines have been issued relating to the reception of casualties resulting from conflict in the Gulf.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance for regional health authorities is in preparation and will be issued soon.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any national health service personnel have been deployed to the Gulf in anticipation of military conflict in that region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Laundry Services, Hereford

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial investment has been made in laundry services and facilities by Hereford health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. E. Bulmer, the chairman of the Herefordshire health authority, for the information he requires.

Organ Transplants

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration is being given to financially assisting intensive therapy units involved in removing organs for transplantation; in how many cases lack of sufficient funds has prevented organs from being requested from next of kin; and what is the cost on average of such operations.

Mr. Dorrell: We are actively considering the possibility of identifying and reimbursing hospitals for costs incurred in organ donation. Information on the reasons why organs are not requested from the next of kin is not collected centrally.

Hospital Complaints Procedure

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he is satisfied that adequate publicity is being given on hospital wards to the existence of the Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985; and what instructions have been issued to health authorities to ensure that this happens.

Mr. Dorrell: Directions were issued to health authorities in June 1988 to

"take such steps as are necessary to ensure that any patients at, or visitors to, any hospital for which the authority is responsible, . . . are fully informed of the arrangements for dealing with complaints made at the hospital and are informed of the identity and location of the designated officer for such hospital."

All regional health authorities have confirmed that the directions are being complied with.

Residential Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *51*, if he will make it his policy to seek an opportunity in the current Session of Parliament to introduce legislation on small residential homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to take an early opportunity to introduce such legislation.

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the total funding currently committed to the care of renal patients either as a result of dialysis or transplantation; and what was the figure for 1978-79.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what directions have been issued to general practitioners about prescribing recently licensed drugs for renal patients when its use would otherwise be limited by pressure on hospital budgets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Responsibility for prescribing, and hence who pays for the treatment, rests with the doctor who has clinical responsibility for the patient. Clinical responsibility can be on a shared care basis if appropriate but this is a matter to be agreed by the professionals involved. GPs, who feel that prescribing a particular drug is beyond their professional competence and not in the best interests of patient care, can quite properly refuse to prescribe.

Wheelchairs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to introduce self-propelled wheelchairs into hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: Decisions on the provision of equipment in hospitals are a matter for individual health authorities. The Department has no plans to require authorities to introduce self-propelled wheelchairs for the use of in-patients.

Community Health Councils

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards community health councils following the reform of the national health service; whether their membership is to be strengthened in line with changes to health authorities; and what consideration has been given to making community health council chairmen co-opted members of the health authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Government policy remains that there will be no change in the fundamental role of community health councils. Amendment regulations have been made to adapt the formal framework within which community health councils operate so as to reflect the new methods of working within the national health service. There are no plans to revise the membership of community health councils, nor to co-opt their chairmen on to health authorities.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

EC Phone Calls

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects that hon. Members will be able to telephone agreed numbers in the European Community via the House of Commons telephone service without charge.

Mr. MacGregor: The Services Committee is expected to consider at its next meeting a proposal to establish direct telecommunications links with a number of European Community exchanges. If the proposal is accepted, the necessary work to establish the connections could be completed a short time thereafter.

Electronic Voting

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will initiate a study of the possibility of introducing a system of electronic voting in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: Any proposal to initiate such a study should be made in the first instance to the Procedure Committee.

WALES

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the application by Pembrokeshire health authority for national health service trust status.

Mr. David Hunt: Pembrokeshire health authority has not yet lodged an application for NHS trust status. The authority has submitted an "Expression of Interest" which outlines its proposal for a trust. I am currently considering this submission and whether to invite an application.

Local Authority Housing

16. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent figure for empty local authority housing for up to *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12 months and *(c)* over one year; if he will list the local authorities concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The total number of empty dwellings on 1 April 1990 was 3,492 representing 1·55 per cent. of the local authority stock. The number of properties vacant for more than six months was 327. Figures for all Welsh authorities are given in the table.

Information on dwellings vacant for 12 months or more is not available.

Vacant dwellings: Source WHO4

Welsh districts	*At 1 April 1990*	*Vacant for more than 6 months*
Aberconwy	23	2
Alyn and Deeside	56	8
Arfon	27	0
Blaenau Gwent	124	2
Brecknock	0	0
Cardiff	293	13
Carmarthen	22	19
Ceredigion	31	3
Colwyn	26	0
Cynon Valley	184	44
Delyn	47	7
Dinefwr	29	0
Dwyfor	6	0
Glyndwr	58	0
Islwyn	170	62
Llanelli	109	33
Lliw Valley	46	29
Meirionnydd	7	2
Merthyr Tydfil	106	1
Monmouth	74	0
Montgomery	36	0
Neath	68	1
Newport	96	16
Ogwr	143	0
Port Talbot	291	0
Preseli	26	1
Radnor	9	0
Rhondda	83	13
Rhuddlan	28	0
Rhymney Valley	64	0
South Pembrokeshire	6	0
Swansea	134	0
Taff-Ely	575	0
Torfaen	169	31
Vale of Glamorgan	40	8
Wrexham Maelor	229	25
Ynys Môn	57	7
Wales total	3,492	327

Japan and Korea (Visit)

21. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what matters were discussed on his recent visit to Japan and Korea.

Mr. David Hunt: I led an inward investment mission to Japan from 13 to 21 November accompanied by the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency.

During my visit I was delighted to be able to announce major new projects in Wales by Yuasa Battery and Gooding Sanken. I also had high-level discussions with other major Japanese companies and I am confident that further investment by Japanese companies will follow and enhance the excellent relationship between Wales and Japan.

I had meetings with senior representatives of the Japanese Government. I also addressed a seminar in Hiroshima organised by the Invest in Britain Bureau.

While in Tokyo I acted as host for a number of senior Japanese business people attending the final performance of the Welsh National Opera. I attended a meeting of the business leaders forum hosted by HRH the Prince of Wales.

I also visited the Oita prefecture of Japan where I discussed ways of developing the close links between Wales and Oita with Governor Hiramatsu.

I very much regret that parliamentary business obliged me to return before conducting my planned engagements in Korea.

National Parks

22. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total amount of funding proposed for national parks for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The total approved expenditure for the three national parks in Wales for the financial year 1991-92 is £5,085,334 of which the Welsh Office will pay £3,814,000 (75 per cent.) by way of national parks supplementary grant and the balance will be met by the relevant county councils. This represents an 11·2 per cent. increase in provision on 1990-91. Since 1982-83 NPSG has increased in Wales in real terms by 37 per cent. a significant increase and evidence of the Government's support for the national parks.

Upper Garw Valley

23. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the starting date to be announced on the Upper Garw valley reclamation scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Development Agency gave formal approval to grant-aid the Upper Garw valley reclamation scheme on 31 March 1990. I understand that the agency is in discussion with Mid Glamorgan county council on the details of the contract and I hope a start date will be announced shortly.

Local Government Finance

24. **Mr. Ieuann Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what correspondence he has received concerning the poll tax and young people on low incomes in Wales.

Mr. Grist: I have received correspondence on various aspects of the community charge, some of which has been about the position of young people.

Hospital Closures, South Glamorgan

25. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority to discuss hospital closures.

Mr. Grist: There are no plans to meet the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority to discuss hospital closures.

Passenger Rail Services

26. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss new passenger rail services.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend expects to meet Sir Robert Reid soon to discuss a range of rail issues.

Tourism

27. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will summarise the achievements of the section 4 grants given to the tourist industry in north Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The section 4 scheme administered by the Wales tourist board, which began operating in 1971, has greatly assisted the tourism industry throughout Wales. Since then, in Clwyd and Gwynedd nearly £17 million of grant and loan assistance has been provided supporting over 860 projects with a capital cost of some £92 million, creating or safeguarding around 3,750 jobs.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the detailed timetable he intends to follow in dealing with the interest expressed by Pembrokeshire health authority in becoming a national health service trust.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend expects to reach a decision shortly on the expression of interest. In the longer term, any final conclusion on national health service trust status will be made following a three-month consultation period in the event that a formal application is submitted.

Legislative Powers

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on Government policy on the devolution of powers of legislation to Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government have no plans to devolve powers of legislation to Wales.

Departmental Office, Brussels

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans for establishing an office of his Department in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: No. The Welsh Office is already in close and sustained contact with the European Commission and with the office of the United Kingdom permanent representation in Brussels, which represents the interests of all Government Departments.

Statisticians

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statisticians are employed in his Department; and how many are responsible for local authority statistics.

Mr. David Hunt: There are 25 statisticians currently employed in a professional capacity in the Welsh Office, of whom 15 are responsible in some degree for local authority statistics.

Sewage Sludge (Bristol Channel)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will request Welsh Water to dump its sewage sludge further west in the Bristol channel; and when he expects it to cease this method of disposal.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to do so, but as my hon. Friend will know, the Government decided earlier this year that all sewage sludge dumping at sea would cease at the latest by December 1998.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of public funding for Tai Cymru for 1990-91.

Mr. Grist: Excluding transfers from local authorities (for which final figures are not yet available), Tai Cymru has gross resources amounting to £102·183 million.

Social Workers

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of field social workers in Wales at the present time; and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Grist: The number of field social workers in Wales is as follows:

Social Workers	*at 30 September*	
	1979	*1989*
Whole-time	748·0	1,033·0
Part-time		
Number	70·0	135·0
wte[1]	36·1	67·2
Total wte	784·1	1,100·2

[1] Whole-time equivalent

Home Helps

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of home helps in Wales at the present time; and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Grist: The number of home helps in Wales is shown in the table:

Home helps	*At 30 September 1979*	*1989*
Whole-time	153·0	401·0
Part-time:		
Number	6,234·0	7,877·0
wte[1]	2,671·8	3,576·8
Total wte	2,824·8	3,977·8

[1] Whole-time equivalents.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of residential places for mentally ill people in Wales at the present time; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Grist: The number of residential places for mentally ill people in Wales is shown in the table:

	As at 31 March 1979	1990
Accommodation provided by		
Social services[1]	[2]329	349
Private registered homes	145	277
Voluntary registered homes	18	53
Other[3]	n.a.	100
Total	492	779

[1]Includes staffed and unstaffed accommodation provided by local authority social services departments.

[2]Excluding 129 mixed places which could accommodate either mentally ill or mentally handicapped people.

[3]Other providers include local authority housing authorities, housing associations, health authorities (excluding hospitals), unregistered private and voluntary homes (i.e. those catering for fewer than four people and which may be staffed or unstaffed).

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest figure for capital expenditure on roads in Wales; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Net capital expenditure on new construction and improvement of motorways and trunk roads in Wales was £118 million in 1989-90 compared with £69 million in 1979-80. Provisional outturn for local authority capital expenditure on transport was £75 million in 1989-90 compared with £49 million in 1979-80.

Council House Sales

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of council houses sold in Wales since the introduction of the right to buy.

Mr. Grist: The number of local authority and new town dwellings sold in Wales under right to buy and voluntary terms since the introduction of right to buy in October 1980 is 85,552.

EMPLOYMENT

HSE (Complaints)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Health and Safety Executive has to change its policy on investigating anonymous complaints.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive has no current plans to change its policy on investigating anonymous complaints.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will indicate how far complaints to the Health and Safety Executive have increased over the last five years; and how much money the field operations division has received in each of the last five years.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of complaints received by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is available only for the last four years. A comparison of the number of complaints received in the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 and 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990 indicates an increase of over 80 per cent. HSE's field operations division was established only on 2 April 1990 with a budget of £50·5 million for 1990-91.

Accident Claims

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to allow the Health and Safety Executive to charge for providing factual statements about matters relating to accident claims.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive has charged for factual statements requested in connection with civil claims since November 1987. Charges are reviewed annually to ensure full recovery of the HSE's costs.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that training and enterprise councils encourage all young people leaving full-time education with vocationally relevant qualifications to participate in this training.

Mr. Jackson: I have set out in the recent publication "1990s: the Skills Decade" the strategic objectives which I expect TECs to address next year. A key objective is that young people should achieve their full potential and develop the skills that the economy needs.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that training and enterprise councils engage a variety of training providers to ensure flexibility in meeting the needs of individual trainees and individual employers.

Mr. Jackson: It is for each training and enterprise council to decide with which training providers to contract to meet the needs of their local community.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that training and enterprise councils construct a simple and stable scheme to devote resources to training and facilitate the development of that training.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) have been given the freedom and flexibility to adapt training schemes to meet the needs of their local area. I am confident that TECs will put these flexibilities to great use.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that training and enterprise councils make available, with appropriate funds, a choice of training for each individual of working age in Leicestershire up to the maximum of the individual's capability in economic terms.

Mr. Jackson: I am confident that the Leicestershire training and enterprise council will provide imaginative and comprehensive plans which will cater for the needs of its local community.

ET Tutors

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for what reasons employment training tutors are requested to fill in forms about trainees in their charge assessing their *(a)* dependency on drugs or alcohol, *(b)* verbal aggressiveness or anti-authority, *(c)* race, *(d)* debts, *(e)* family trap, *(f)* hygiene, *(g)* benefit problems and *(h)* single parenthood.

Mr. Jackson: It is not Government policy to require training and enterprise councils to ensure that this information is obtained from ET trainees. However, details of ethnic origin may be provided voluntarily by trainees on their trainee record form.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his policy towards discrimination on the grounds of age within the labour market.

Mr. Jackson: Our policy is to persuade employers to consider all applicants on merit, without imposing arbitrary age limits on recruitment.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of age within the workplace.

Mr. Jackson: We have no plans to introduce legislation on age discrimination, since we believe that it would be difficult to apply and uncertain in its effect.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information is available to his Department on legislation in other countries that outlaws age discrimination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that Canada and the United States of America have legislation on age discrimination in employment. I have not seen any evidence as to its effectiveness.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what *(a)* information and *(b)* research he has commissioned into discrimination on the grounds of age in the workplace.

Mr. Jackson: In 1989 my Department commissioned research from the Institute of Manpower Studies into the employment and utilisation of older workers. However, this exercise was mainly concerned with employers' recruitment practices, rather than whether discrimination occurred within the workplace itself.

Training

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his intention to provide all youth trainees, by negotiation, with personal training plans specifying the intended level of achievement, not necessarily in national vocational qualification terms but related to their own ability and aspirations and the needs of their actual or possible employment, and capable of change if the trainee, managing agent and employer agree it is necessary.

Mr. Jackson: I am currently reviewing the approach to ET and YT personal training plans with a view to introducing common procedure and terminology. We shall retain the principle of variation by agreement between trainee and training provider, and we shall as a minimum require a national vocational qualification or equivalent objective to be clearly stated. Training providers will be free, as now, to include other aspirations All training plans will be based on assessment of individual needs.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the extent to which youth training builds on existing strengths of managing agents acquired over years of adaptation.

Mr. Jackson: Youth training (YT) builds on the success of YTS in helping young people achieve qualifications and jobs. Training and enterprise councils have the responsibility for developing their networks of YT training providers in order to continue improving on the work already achieved through YTS.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what extent youth training offers a service to all up to and including the age of 18 years not in full-time education, to start and complete work-related training.

Mr. Jackson: All young people under 18 who are not in full-time education or a job are guaranteed the offer of a suitable youth training (YT) place if they want one. YT helps eligible young people to acquire the broad-based skills necessary for a flexible and self-reliant work force and provides participants with training leading to national vocational qualifications at or above level II. Young people with special training needs receive appropriate training so that they can progress as far as possible towards general and vocational competences.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will arrange for high levels of payment for any trainees showing evidence of under-achievement in literacy and numeracy, in lieu of paying on achieving NVQ 2.

Mr. Jackson: Levels and methods of payment for training are entirely matters for local negotiation between training and enterprise councils and their training providers.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take to ensure that training and enterprise councils will be committed to securing excellence and quality of methods and outcomes of training.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are required to draw up a strategy for securing quality training as part of their plans. The quality of training provided will be monitored by inspectors from my training standards advisory service.

Advertising

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the expenditure on *(a)* press advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* outdoor advertising, *(d)* regional campaigns, *(e)* exhibition material, *(f)* research and *(g)* presentations for action for jobs in 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Jackson: All the expenditure on press advertising, radio advertising, outdoor advertising and research for action for jobs in 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information. Expenditure on action for jobs regional campaigns, presentations and exhibition material in 1987-88 was not placed through the Central Office of Information.

SCOTLAND

Steel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the remit given to A. D. Little by the Scottish Development Agency extends to an examination of options for steel production at Hunterston.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the A. D. Little study includes conducting an examination of possible retrenchment of tube finishing within British Steel's diversified activities division; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the A. D. Little study into Scottish steel is to include an examination of seamless tube production and steelmaking at Clydesdale and the finishing process at the Imperial Works; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The remit given to A. D. Little by the Scottish Development Agency was broadly drawn. It requires it to carry out a wide-ranging analysis of the prospects and opportunities which may arise for the steel industry in any part of Scotland, taking into account Scotland's locational, resource and asset base; and to assess the commercial viability of any opportunities identified. The remit does not exclude consideration of any location within Scotland, nor does it include a requirement to examine operational decisions by British Steel.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to publish the A. D. Little preliminary report of December 1990 and its final report in 1991.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I cannot give a categorical assurance at this stage that all parts of the consultants' report will be published as some of these are likely to be commercially confidential. But I hope that it will be possible to publish the greater part of the study.

Statisticians

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many statisticians are employed in his Department; and how many are responsible for local authority statistics.

Mr. Lang: Of the 28 statisticians employed in the Scottish Office, 23 have some involvement with local authority statistics.

Consultancy Fees

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board the amount spent on consultancy fees for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 November 1990]:* Information available from the annual accounts of health boards relates to the total fees paid to management consultants, to legal firms (other than for legal expenses connected with compensation claims) and to work study consultants. The amounts for each health board for 1989-90 are shown in the table.

Health board	*1989-90* £
Argyll and Clyde	87,915
Ayrshire and Arran	108,581
Borders	12,745
Dumfries and Galloway	119,382
Fife	51,065
Forth Valley	88,951
Grampian	125,599
Greater Glasgow	1,638,006
Highland	221,947
Lanarkshire	161,286
Lothian	473,223
Orkney	2,260
Shetland	3,368
Tayside	118,802
Western Isles	827
Total	3,213,957

Salmon

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Salmon Farmers Association; and if he will make a statement on the current situation in the salmon farming industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 November 1990]:* Lord Sanderson of Bowden met representatives of the salmon farming industry (but not necessarily of the association) from time to time. My noble Friend Lord Strathclyde hopes to meet the Scottish Salmon Growers Association soon. This will provide a full opportunity to discuss current developments in the industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Security Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to make the security services accountable to Committees of the House.

The Prime Minister: No.

Press Conferences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to discontinue the practice of confidential daily briefings for journalists at No. 10 Downing street in favour of open, on-the-record press conferences.

The Prime Minister: No.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister is he will put to the intergovernmental conference proposals to end majority voting in the Council of Ministers.

The Prime Minister: No.

European Central Bank

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the establishment of a European central bank; and what proposals Her Majesty's Government have to ensure that such a bank would be politically accountable.

The Prime Minister: The Government remain opposed to the imposition of a single monetary policy managed by a European Central Bank as prescribed in stage 3 of the Delors report.

The Government have instead put forward proposals for a hard ecu managed by a European monetary fund. We will negotiate constructively at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference on the basis of these proposals in the hope and expectation that we can agree an outcome which satisfies the House of Commons and our European partners.

European Parliament

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what facilities are currently available to Members of the European Parliament within the United Kingdom Parliament and to United Kingdom Members of Parliament in the European Parliament; and what proposals exist for improving these arrangements.

The Prime Minister: At Strasbourg Members have access to all areas adjacent to the main debating chamber and, by invitation, can attend specialist committees of the European Parliament. At Westminster, United Kingdom MEPs have access to the Peers Galleries and Lobby and offices of the European Communities Office in the House of Lords. In this House they have access by photo-identity pass to the Central Lobby, the Lower and Upper Waiting Halls and the Committee Corridor.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on strengthening the powers of the European Parliament.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said during the debate on the Address on 8 November, we would like to strengthen the European Parliament's role in monitoring Community expenditure.

Community Legislation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to strengthen the scrutiny of Community legislation by national Parliaments.

The Prime Minister: It is for each national Parliament to decide its own procedures for the scrutiny of Community legislative proposals. The growing interest in the need for effective arrangements is encouraging.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will seek to spread the best practices of national Parliaments to enhance national scrutiny of, and commitment to, proposals emanating from the European Community.

The Prime Minister: We have repeatedly made clear the need for national Parliaments to become more closely involved in Community affairs, and for effective national scrutiny procedures. Our own procedures are widely regarded as among the most thorough in the Community.

Intergovernmental Conferences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place copies of the agenda of the intergovernmental conferences in the Vote Office.

The Prime Minister: No agendas have been set for the intergovernmental conferences; the IGCs themselves will decide how to organise their work.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to consult the House by means of debate before going to the intergovernmental conferences in December.

The Prime Minister: There will be a debate in the House on 6 December on developments in the EC prior to the Rome European Council. This will, among other subjects, look forward to the intergovernmental conferences which start on 15 December.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what items have been tabled for discussion at each of the intergovernmental conferences in December.

The Prime Minister: The intergovernmental conferences will set their own agenda. They will consider the various proposals made by member states, as well as the opinions delivered by the European Parliament and the Commission on the calling of the IGCs.

European Community (Accountability)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what action the Government are proposing to strengthen the democratic accountability of the European Community.

The Prime Minister: The Government have suggested ways to increase the Community's financial accountability to the European Parliament and involve national parliaments more closely in Community affairs. Improved scrutiny procedures have recently been introduced in this House.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will propose the adoption of a clear statement of the lines of subsidiarity between European and national institutions of the intergovernmental conference by those European and national institutions.

The Prime Minister: We hope that the forthcoming intergovernmental conference will agree a clear definition of the principle of subsidiarity in order to clarify the division of responsibility between national Governments and the Community.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in seeking a revaluation of the pound sterling within the ERM.

The Prime Minister: On sterling's entry to the ERM, the Government undertook an express obligation to keep sterling within specified bands around the agreed central rates. We are fully committed to fulfilling that obligation.

Period of Office

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consider bringing forward proposals to limit the period that any one individual may serve as Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: No.

Community Charge

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ensure, as one result of his recently announced poll tax review, that the Welsh and Scottish Departments collate and publish the same breadth of regular poll tax statistics as those produced by the Department of the Environment.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies that I gave to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) on 29 November at column 1010.

Social Security Legislation

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government intend to introduce any changes to the social security legislation to allow local authorities again to operate discretionary rebate schemes.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* Local authorities already have the discretion to disregard war widows pension and war disablement pension in excess of the statutory £10 disregard when assessing housing benefit and community charge benefit entitlement. They also have the power to grant extra benefit to individual claimants in exceptional circumstances. We have no present plans to extend the scope of these powers.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will now support the incorporation of the European convention on human rights.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* No.

Classless Society

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what measures he intends to take to bring about a classless society.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* Measures to extend opportunity further will be brought forward in due course.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what capacity the automated low-flying enquiry and notification system will have to trace the routes taken by low-flying aircraft, as an aid to aircraft identification in the event of a public complaint;

(2) what capacity the automated low-flying enquiry and notification system will have to produce graphic presentations showing the geographical distribution of military low-level air traffic, as an aid to management of the United Kingdom low-flying system.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: For the reasons set out in my Department's evidence to the Defence Committee's inquiry on low-flying (*Official Report* 120, pages 158 and 174), the ALFENS system is not intended to store detailed route information for routine daytime low-flying sorties in the United Kingdom which would be necessary to provide the capabilities mentioned. The system should, however, provide a more rapid means of tracing individual aircraft and of analysing the usage of individual low-flying areas.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what period the figures for operational low-flying movements in the Borders tactical training area, provided in his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley of 14 June, *Official Report*, column *325*, refer; and if he will list the equivalent figure for the period 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The figures for operational low-flying movements in the Borders tactical training area provided in the reply which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) gave to the hon. Member on 14 June 1990 related to the periods specified in that reply. The equivalent figure for the period 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1990 is 2,025.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what length of time records of individual bookings into the United Kingdom low-flying system are retained.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Such records are normally retained for three years.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying movements at less than 250 ft were authorised in each of the tactical training areas in each month since January; and on how many days in each month such activity was authorised in each area.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In 1990 the number of movements authorised for flying below 250 ft within tactical training areas has been as follows:

Low flying 1990	*Northern Scotland*		*Central Wales*		*Borders*	
	Operational of which movements	*Number of days low flying authorised*	*Operational of which movements*	*Number of days low flying authorised*	*Operational of which movements*	*Number of days authorised*
January	72	14	6	5	149	14
February	26	20	1	10	347	20
March	436	18	15	15	413	20
April	118	17	2	12	216	17
May	340	13	0	2	185	12
June	8	5	6	5	68	5
July	3	15	0	0	72	17
August	74	[1]	97	[1]	530	[1]
September	49	[1]	71	[1]	714	[1]
October	74	[1]	32	[1]	709	[1]

[1] Since 9 August, all three tactical training areas have been made available for operational low flying training on weekdays and, exceptionally in the case of the Borders TTA, on Saturday 11 August, to enable essential aircrew workup training to take place associated with the United Kingdom's commitment in the Gulf.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the reason for his Department's policy of not retaining central records showing operational low-flying movements in the eastern and western parts of the Borders tactical training area separately.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There is no such policy. Operational low-flying movements in the eastern and western parts of the Borders tactical training area have been shown separately in central records since September 1989.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what authorisation was given for low-flying below 250 ft over the United Kingdom on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 November; what was the area for which any such authorisation was given; how many sorties took place as a result; what types of aircraft and units were involved; and what was the purpose of the training.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Operational low-flying training in the Borders tactical training area was exceptionally authorised over the weekend of 17-18 November for Tornado aircrew conducting training connected with our current commitment in the Gulf. However, in the event, no such low flying took place.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if bookings into the Borders tactical training area east and the Borders tactical training area west are recorded separately by the RAF tactical booking cell at West Drayton.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year Royal Air Force fast jet pilots were first formally qualified to fly at 100 ft.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested is not readily available, but there has been a requirement for a very limited amount of such flying for many years and this predates the introduction of the present United Kingdom low flying system in 1979.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United States air force F-15 aircraft deployed to RAF Leuchars *(a)* during the period 17 to 28 June and *(b)* in the week commencing 16 July, were permitted to conduct low-flying over the United Kingdom during their deployment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: United States air force F-15 aircraft deployed to RAF Leuchars were permitted to make very limited use of the United Kingdom low-flying system during the period 19 to 28 June, weekends excepted, in support of joint maritime course 90/2. No F-15 aircraft were deployed to RAF Leuchars during week commencing 16 July 1990.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the agreed changes in readiness and availability of Royal Air Force forces, referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley on 1 November, *Official Report*, column *761*, will have on the low-flying training requirements of *(a)* Royal Air Force, Germany, and *(b)* United Kingdom-based Royal Air Force units.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I do not expect the measures agreed so far to have any immediate effect on the Royal Air Force's requirement for low-flying training.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any occasions since June 1988 on which *(a)* the Borders tactical training area west has been activated at a time when the Borders tactical training area east is not activated and *(b)* the Borders tactical training area east has been activated at a time when the Borders tactical training area west is not activated.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Harrier GR7

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which will be the first Royal Air Force squadron to equip with the Harrier GR7; and when it will begin flying training on the type.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. 4 Squadron received the Harrier GR7 aircraft and commenced flying training on the type in October this year.

RAF Tornados

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of six additional Royal Air Force Tornados to Goose bay, Canada, in June.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A detachment of six Royal Air Force Tornado F3 aircraft deployed to Goose bay in June to carry out training in conjunction with other Royal Air Force and allied aircraft carrying out low-level training there.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operational availability of the RAF Tornado aircraft currently on active service in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Excellent operational availability is being achieved by the Royal Air Force's Tornado aircraft, which are making a highly potent and valued contribution to the allied air forces deployed to the Gulf.

RAF Harrier (Dive Attack)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the location of the dive attack referred to in his Department's evidence to the Defence Committee (HC 120, page 180) concerning an incident involving a Royal Air Force Harrier on 8 July 1988.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 1 November 1990 at column *765*.

Kuwait Liberation Army

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has discussed with his Arab and United States of America counterparts in respect of the activities of the group known as the Kuwait liberation army, and its trainers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any group by that name.

NATO Forward Scatter Sites

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any decision has been made on the future of the NATO forward scatter sites; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) was the outcome of the meeting at SHAPE on 24 September on the future of the NATO forward scatter sites; and when his officials first informed the Defence Police Federation of decisions taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO is considering the future of its ACE HIGH communications network. The sites which host ACE HIGH installations are being examined concurrently in connection with national communication requirements. The Defence Police Federation has been made aware of developments informally and will be advised in the normal way when the way forward is known.

Security Guards

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a decision has been made on the arming of his Department's new security guard force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The arrangements for the established of the proposed new guard service are under consideration. No decision has been taken on whether any elements of it should be armed.

Operation Granby

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there is anything further he can announce about the effect of Operation Granby on the defence cash and running cost limits for this financial year.

Mr. Tom King: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(1) Defence Cash Limits

£000s

Class and vote	*Current cash limit*	*Increase*	*Revised cash limit*
I, 1	9,008,295	100,000	9,108,295
I, 2	8,744,597	200,000	8,944,597

These changes, which increase the block defence cash limit by £300,000,000 from £21,585,449,000 to £21,885,449,000 are for costs arising from the deployments of British forces to the Gulf area.

(2) Running Cost Limit

Within this the running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £90,000,000 from £5,272,678,000 to £5,362,678,000.

The increases were not allowed for within the forecast outturn planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Data Logic Ltd.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature of the outstanding issues that resulted in the special extra-contractual payment that was made to Data Logic Ltd.

Mr. Alan Clark: Payment was made in respect of work carried out by Data Logic Ltd. up to the termination of the contract. Issues concerning the extent of conformance of the proposed functional specifications with the army cataloguing authority's requirements brought this work outside the terms of the contract.

Appropriation Accounts

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the numbers and civil service grades of the engineering staff involved in the transaction referred to in his reply of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *507;* what is the name of the contractor involved; what disciplinary action was taken against the engineering staff involved in this transaction; and what steps have been taken to ensure that the staff involved are not employed by the contractor in this transaction after their retirement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The matter is the subject of an internal investigation and I cannot comment further at the moment.

Civil Service Appeal Board

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department decided to take no disciplinary action against those representatives of his Department who were in communication with members of the Civil Service Appeal Board prior to Mr. Colin Wallace's appeal in 1975.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No breach of discipline occurred in connection with this communication which would justify action being taken against anyone.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his policy on permitting representatives of his Department to communicate with members of the Civil Service Appeal Board on matters relating to individuals whose cases are due to come before the board;

(2) on how many occasions in the past 20 years representatives of his Department have communicated with members of the Civil Service Appeal Board on matters relating to individuals whose cases are due to come before the board.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has many contacts of a routine administrative character with the Civil Service Appeal Board; detailed statistics of these are not kept. As I indicated in my letter of 13 September to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) (of which a copy was placed in the Library), we would not now place before members of the board evidence not available in formal proceedings.

Military Occupation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any plans have been made since 1960 for military operations in the event of a foreign military occupation of the United Kingdom;

(2) what plans currently exist for military operations in the event of a foreign military occupation of the United Kingdom;

(3) what contact has taken place with Greek Government officials regarding planning for operations in the event of a foreign military occupation of Greece.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the Government's practice to comment on such questions.

Austrian Airspace

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions apply to the transport of military equipment from bases in Germany to the Gulf

area through Austrian airspace; what problems and costs have arisen from the restrictions; and if any request has been made to the Austrian authorities for the relaxation of the restrictions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The details of bilateral arrangements with other countries covering military overflights are classified and it is not the Government's policy to comment on such matters.

United States Forces Housing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all housing projects for the United States forces based in the United Kingdom for which appropriated funds were requested from the United States Congress in the last five fiscal years, giving for each project its location, which fiscal year the money was requested, how many dwellings were planned, and whether it has been approved by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* I understand that the only housing construction project funded by United States appropriated funds in the United Kingdom during the last five United States fiscal years was for department of defense personnel at Menwith Hill approved in United States fiscal year 1986; 14 housing units were built, with local authority planning approval and Her Majesty's Government's consent.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 December 1990

ENERGY

Mersey Oil Pipeline

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to publish the report into the failure of the Mersey oil pipeline.

Mr. Wakeham: I have today published the report, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Accountability

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to improve ministerial accountability to Parliament.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* Ministers are already fully accountable to Parliament.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Aid

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if his Department plans to make any representations to the European Commission about allowing United Kingdom objective 2 regions to be eligible for assistance under the European Commission's Telematique programme;

(2) if his Department plans to make any representations to the European Commission about allowing United Kingdom objective 2 regions to be eligible for assistance under the PRISMA initiative.

Mr. Leigh: The European Commission has decided that the proposed Telematique and PRISMA initiatives should be restricted to objective 1 regions, which include Northern Ireland. The Commission's decision took account of the requirement in article 12(5) of Council regulation (EEC) No. 2052/88 about devoting approximately 80 per cent. of the European regional development fund to objective 1. Other Community initiatives, notably RECHAR, apply in objective 2 regions.

Commercial opportunities arising from expenditure in objective 1 regions under Telematique and PRISMA will of course be available to companies throughout the United Kingdom.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the extent to which United Kingdom regions will benefit from the European Community's STRIDE programme.

Mr. Leigh: The European Commission's STRIDE initiative will provide support from the European Community structural funds for research and development projects and technology transfer in Northern Ireland and in objective 2 regions in Great Britain. The Commission has indicated a financial allocation to the United Kingdom of 28 mecu (about £20 million) until 1993.

Drambuie Liqueur Company

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will prosecute the directors of the Drambuie Liqueur Company for failure to file up-to-date accounts under sections 242 and 244 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: The accounts for Drambuie Liqueur Company were received at Companies house on 31 October 1990; therefore, section 244 does not apply.

Task Forces

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the location and number of task forces which have been set up, together with a list of their functions and budgets.

Mr. Leigh: There are five business task forces located in DTI headquarters divisions. Their functions cover certain specific tasks on commodities and steel, aircraft and aero-engines, shipbuilding, vehicles and market opportunities. The main budgets for which they are responsible are as follows:

	1990-91 Estimates/ provision £ million
Development of the EH101 helicopter	12·5
Development of the A330/340 airliners	134·0
(Launch aid levy receipts	73·7)
Home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme	43·5
Shipbuilding intervention fund	25·0
Assistance to redundant steelworkers	16·3
Civil aircraft research and demonstration	25·4

Details of these budgets are set out in the Supply Estimates 1990-91 (class IV Trade and Industry) and in chapter 4 of the "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93" (Cm 1004).

As my Department's contribution to the Government's action for cities programme, there are 16 inner-city task forces. Their function is to generate enterprise in defined areas of particular deprivation and to create training and employment opportunities for the residents of those areas. In aggregate their budget for expenditure on projects in 1990-91 is £20·4 million. Task forces are located in:

- London (4)
  - West (North Kensington and Hammersmith)
  - Spitalfields
  - Deptford
  - North Peckham
- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Bristol
- Coventry
- Derby
- Hartlepool
- Leeds
- Manchester
- Merseyside (2)
  - Toxteth (Liverpool)
  - Wirral (Birkenhead)
- Middlesbrough
- Nottingham

Mortgages

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to bring all mortgages under the Financial Services Act and to instruct tied agents and direct salesmen to display their status in advertisements, correspondence and premises.

Mr. Redwood: The investment element of mortgages is already subject to the requirements of the Financial Services Act. The display by tied agents and direct salesmen of their status is a matter for the regulatory body concerned.

Industry Council

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community Industry Council held on 26 November.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 December 1990:]* The Industry Council meeting on 26 November, which Lord Hesketh attended for the United Kingdom, adopted a directive on aid for the Community shipbuilding industry and considered a communication from the Commission on industrial policy. The Council also discussed a Commission proposal to extend the patent term for pharmaceuticals, the industrial implications of the Uruguay round, the future of the ECSC treaty and Community craft industries.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UNRWA

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the increase of contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency made by Council of Europe member states at the recent pledging conference.

Mrs. Chalker: At the November pledging conference at the United Nations General Assembly, donor countries announced contributions to UNRWA for 1991 totalling almost US$200 million. Of this Council of Europe member states have so far pledged some US$73 million.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Governors

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he gives to local education authorities about the extent of the counselling they should give to school governing bodies under the local management of schools.

Mr. Fallon: It is for local education authorities to determine the amount, nature and timetable of training and support for school governors, in the light of local needs. Plans for governor support and training must be included in Schemes for the local management of schools. Over the four years 1989-90 to 1992-93, the Government will be supporting expenditure of around £247 million on the implementation of LMS. Some £24 million will be spent directly on support and training for school governors; other expenditure on equipping all schools with management information systems, and training school administrative staff to use them; on helping LEAs to implement their LMS schemes; on management training for heads and other senior teachers; and, from 1991-92, on support for the administration costs of schools with delegated budgets, will also help governors exercise their new responsibilities.

Teachers

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will change their conditions of service to allow teachers adequate time for planning, preparation and assessment resulting from the introduction of the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The use of teachers' directed time, and in particular its division between teaching and non-teaching duties, is a matter for head teachers to decide.

Education Spending

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was spending per pupil in 1979 and in the latest available year for which figures are available in each of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The readily available data are as follows:

Public re-current expenditure per pupil[1] in calendar years at 1985 prices

£ sterling

	1st level		*2nd level*		*1st and 2nd levels*	
	1983	*1986*	*1983*	*1986*	*1983*	*1986*
France[2]	920	1,020	1,440	1,610	1,210	1,360
West Germany[3]	1,080	1,110	1,400	1,580	1,320	1,440
Japan	980	1,030	1,220	1,210	1,080	1,110
United Kingdom[4]	980	1,050	1,440	1,720	1,230	1,410
United States of America a	n/a	1,760	n/a	2,470	1,740	1,990
b[5]	n/a	1,760	n/a	2,130	n/a	1,904

n/a not available.

[1] At purchasing power parity.

[2] Public expenditure including subsidies to private education and pupils/students in public and private education.

[3] Public sector education only.

[4] Public expenditure only. First level includes primary education from 5 years of age. Second level includes secondary and further education.

[5] Includes students and expenditure on courses some of which may be equated with second level education.

Child Protection Teachers

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much his Department is making available in the current financial year in support of the community education development centre's project to assist local education authorities in the training of teachers designated by schools as child protection teachers; and how many teachers are currently covered by the scheme.

Mr. Fallon: Up to £35,000 is being made available for this purpose by the Department in the current financial year. The principal objective of the project is to train the trainers of designated teachers. Thus, for every local education authority that takes up the offer of the courses, the designated teacher in each of their schools will benefit; and other teachers will also benefit from the knowledge and awareness spread through the schools by the designated teachers. About one sixth of local education authorities have so far participated in the scheme, and more courses are scheduled.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the budget for grant support towards the cost incurred by local education authorities undertaking training of staff in child protection for the years from 1979-80 to 1990-91.

Mr. Fallon: Sums have not been separately identified within grant programmes for this area of training. It is for each local education authority to determine what provision to make to meet local circumstances, taking account of the various sources of income available to it, including general revenue support grant and the LEA training grants scheme.

AFRC Staff

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of *(a)* scientific and *(b)* non-scientific staff that are employed at each of the Agricultural and Food Research Council institutes; what are his estimates for 1991, 1992 and 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures for scientific and non-scientific staff in post on 1 April 1990 and the estimated number of staff in post on 1 April 1991 for each Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC) institute are as follows:

	1990		*[1] 1991*	
	Scientific	*Non-scientific*	*Scientific*	*Non-scientific*
IACR	449	251	433	246
IAH	292	228	283	227
IAPGR	337	222	321	208
IER	115	194	103	163
IFR	381	171	245	131
IGER	308	224	285	209
IPSR	234	92	234	92
TOTAL	2,116	1,382	1,904	1,276

[1] Estimate.

Abbreviations:
IACR —Institute of Arable Crops Research.
IAH —Institute for Animal Health.
IAPGR—Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics.
IER —Institute of Engineering Research.
IFR —Institute of Food Research.
IGER —Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research.
IPSR —Institute of Plant Science Research.

In addition, 295 scientific and 269 non-scientific AFRC staff were seconded to the British Society of Horticultural Research (since renamed Horticulture Research International) on 1 April 1990. The estimated numbers of these staff for 1 April 1991 are 260 and 245 respectively.

The number of staff employed on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993 will depend on a number of factors, including the funding available to the AFRC through the science budget and the extent of commissions from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and externally funded research. The present estimate is that the number of scientific staff employed by the AFRC at its institutes and Horticulture Research International will be about 1,960 and the number of non-scientific staff will be about 1,400 on each date. No breakdown of anticipated staffing levels at each AFRC institute is available.

19-year-olds (Non-advanced Education)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his best estimate of the numbers of 19-year-olds in full-time non-advanced education.

Mr. Eggar: In 1989-90, there were 19,000 full-time students aged 19 in further education in England.

SERC Report

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Science and Engineering Research Council for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The annual report of the Science and Engineering Research Council for 1989-90 has been submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy is being placed before the House today.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I were pleased to note a number of significant achievements through council activity during the past year, including:

(a) the inauguration of, and initial results from, the large electron positron (LEP) collider at CERN, the laboratory for European particle physics research in Geneva;

(b) the successful completion of the Solar Maximum mission; as part of which United Kingdom instruments on board this NASA satellite provided detailed data about the Sun; and

(c) a 10-year project at City university, resulting in a heightened ability to detect or correct faults in the electricity grid system; and

(d) collaborative research at Oxford university, jointly funded by SERC and Rolls-Royce plc, to increase understanding of gas flows and heat transfer in turbine blades.

Following these achievements in the past year, we now look forward to learning SERC's new assessment of scientific priorities following the review of forward activities now under way.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Funds

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all organisations in Denton and Reddish constituency receiving training funds.

Mr. Jackson: There are five organisations in Denton and Reddish constituency receiving training funds through contracts with the Manchester TEC and the Stockport and High Peak TEC. The CCE business centre, Windmill lane, Denton is contracted to provide employment training. The other organisations receive funds under the business growth training programme. These contracts are commercial-in-confidence and names cannot be given.

Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what commitment his Department offers to training schemes specifically aimed at encouraging women to return to work.

Mr. Jackson: My Department's work to promote women's participation in training has been based on the requirement that all training providers implement a positive commitment to equal opportunities. Action has therefore been directed at removing the barriers that women encounter in reconciling training with their domestic commitments and allowing them access to the full range of programmes. The training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are addressing the specific needs of women returners and providing training schemes that meet them.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Antarctica

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of future mining options in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have tabled, and are seeking support for, an environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty, but we believe there can be no comprehensive system for the protection of the Antarctic environment that does not deal with the longer term issue of minerals. We therefore see the need to reach agreement on a legally binding instrument to address the question of minerals before the need for it arises.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to direct the British delegation to the meeting of the Antarctic treaty parties in Chile to make clear their support for the declaration of a world park in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The British delegation to the XIth special consultative meeting of Antarctic treaty parties is prepared to discuss all proposals which could lead to a return to consensus within the Antarctic treaty.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Christian Salvesen in respect of plans to remove hazardous materials and waste from their abandoned whaling station on South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Officials of this Department have held discussions over the past year with Christian Salvesen plc about pollutants at the four disused whaling stations on South Georgia of which the company are the leaseholders. An operation to clean up the stations, funded jointly by Christian Salvesen and the Administration of South Georgia, will start shortly.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his present policy in respect of the declaration of a world park in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We remain committed to achieving the best possible environmental protection for Antarctica, and to this end, regard the maintenance of the Antarctic treaty system and a return to consensus within it as essential. Whilst we do not see any merit in calling it a world park—it is already a "Special Conservation Area" under the 1964 agreed measures for the conservation of Antarctic fauna and flora—we are prepared to discuss all proposals to protect the Antarctic environment.

Civil Nuclear Facilities, Iraq

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the intentions of the safeguards authorities of the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect civil nuclear facilities in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The IAEA announced on 27 November that their inspectors had carried out a safeguards inspection in Iraq and had concluded that all material under safeguards could be accounted for.

British Embassy, Washington

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in connection with the recent visit by the First Secretary of the British embassy in Washington, Mr. Sherard Cowper-Coles, to the conference in Boston hosted by the Investor Responsor Research Centre, what costs were involved in *(a)* travelling, *(b)* accommodation, *(c)* entertainment and *(d)* other expenses.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The costs were as follows:

	US$
(a) Travelling	371·00
(b) Accommodation	108·85
(c) Entertainment	None
(d) Other expenses (meals)	69·15

	US$
Total	549·00

Iran

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made with regard to the imprisonment of *(a)* Fatemeh Hosseinzadeh Tussi Moghadam, *(b)* Dr. Fatemeh Izadi and *(c)* Nahid Dorudiahi by the Islamic Republic of Iran;

(2) what representations he has made with regard to the imprisonment of *(a)* Malekeh Mohammadi, *(b)* Zohach Ghaeni and *(c)* Mariam Firouz by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. But we note that the persons in question are mentioned in the report of the UN special representative on human rights in Iran, Mr. Galindo Pohl, and that he has called on the Iranian Government to respond in detail to the allegations of abuses of human rights put to them.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is making representations to the Islamic Republic of Iran on their human rights record.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Together with our partners in the European Community, we are seeking a resolution in the third committee of the United Nations which reflects the state of human rights in Iran. This is a matter we take very seriously.

Bulgaria

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the need for humanitarian aid in Bulgaria; how much humanitarian aid has been given by the United Kingdom to Bulgaria; and what plans the Government has for future humanitarian aid to Bulgaria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are contributing to humanitarian aid through the European Community's PHARE aid programme. The Community has recently approved a mother and child health support programme worth approximately £3·5 million. We have encouraged the Commission to consider urgently Bulgarian requests for humanitarian aid (including food and medical supplies). The question was last discussed during the meeting of the EC-Bulgaria Joint Commission on 30 November.

Syria

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the Syrian Government on their human rights record.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Like any other Government, the Syrian Government are well aware of our position on human rights. Following the resumption of diplomatic relations with Syria, we shall be better placed to make representations when this is justified.

Kurdistan

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will put Kurdistan and the situation of Kurdish people on the agenda of any future peace conference on the middle east.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We cannot at this stage outline the agenda of any future middle east peace conference. We expect the rights of all peoples in the region, including the Kurds, to be respected by the Governments of the countries in which they live. We do not recognise an independent Kurdish state. The frontiers of states in the region are set by international treaty.

Saudi Arabia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is making representations to the Saudi Arabian Government on their human rights record.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Saudi Government are well aware of the importance we attach to the observance of human rights standards.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Drainage Authorities

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those occasions in the past five years when he has used his powers under the Land Drainage Act 1976 or the Water Act 1989 to give directions to a regional or local flood defence committee of the National Rivers Authority, or their equivalent under previous legislation in cases where they are promoting a specific land drainage or flood defence scheme which does not accord with his priorities.

Mr. Curry: Powers to give such directions in relation to capital land drainage or flood defence schemes have only been available since the coming into force of the Water Act 1989. No direction could therefore be given under the Land Drainage Act 1976, and none has so far been given under the Water Act 1989.

Feedstuff Additives

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to restrict the use of canthaxanthin as an animal feedstuff additive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have accepted the expert advice of the Food Advisory Committee that the use of canthaxanthin as a feed additive should cease and I have asked the EC Commission to urgently review the data on the toxicity of canthaxanthin in order to achieve concerted EC action to prohibit its use in feed. The EC Commission has responded promptly by referring the matter to its expert scientific committee, the Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition. This committee is urgently considering data supplied by the United Kingdom.

Grain

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the quantity and value of grain produced in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979 stating value in real and 1990 prices.

Mr. Curry: The table shows information on the tonnage of cereals produced and the available information on its value. Following standard practice, valuations are only made of (net) off-farm sales and of changes in on-farm stocks; cereals used directly on-farms are not valued. The valuations are at current prices (ie the prices pertaining in each year) and at 1985 prices.

Production and Output of Cereals in the United Kingdom

Calendar year	*Production ('000 tonnes)*	*Output (=Sales) (£ million)*	*Value of physical change in on-farm stocks (£ million)*	*Total (£ million) at current prices*	*at 1985 prices*
1979	17,416	1,184	11	1,195	1,315
1980	19,482	1,462	−3	1,459	1,546
1981	19,621	1,693	−30	1,663	1,623
1982	21,910	2,062	−29	2,033	1,859
1983	21,307	1,996	85	2,081	1,759
1984	26,602	2,420	84	2,504	2,421
1985	22,466	2,281	−141	2,140	2,140
1986	24,489	2,174	22	2,196	2,202
1987	21,675	2,043	−35	2,008	2,025
1988	21,028	1,898	−18	1,880	1,980
1989	22,685	1,926	67	1,993	2,067
1990	22,533	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a Not yet available.

Gramoxone

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the use of Gramoxone; whether his Department is aware of any impact of this product on the population of the brown hare; if he is conducting any relevant research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The use of Gramoxone (active ingredient paraquat) is monitored regularly as part of the rolling survey of pesticide usage carried out by Agriculture Departments, the results of which are published. It has been alleged to cause mortality in brown hares but exhaustive tests carried out by MAFF scientists have failed to establish any link. Another possibility is a virus disease, similar to one found in rabbits, which has been detected in several European countries. To pinpoint the real cause farmers have been asked to report all suspicious deaths of brown hares. Their carcases will be checked for viral symptoms in addition to the normal tests for pesticides.

Market Support and Grant Schemes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the market support schemes and *(b)* the grant schemes operated by his Ministry for which financial resources do not come from the European Community.

Mr. Gummer: Market support schemes and grant schemes are listed, together with their financial provision in the supply estimates. Figures for the previous 10 years are available in the publication "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1989" and in the annual review of agriculture White Papers. These publications are available in the Library of the House.

Fishermen Research Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of *(a)* scientists and *(b)* non-scientific staff employed at his fisheries research centres since 1980, including those expected to be employed in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Gummer: The numbers of staff are broken down as follows:

	1980	*1990*
Scientific, professional and technical staff	256	251½
Marine staff	88	51
Others (including e.g. administrative and support staff)	134½	101½
Totals (excluding casuals)	478½	404

The manpower numbers at the Directorate of Fisheries Research in 1991-92 will depend upon the estimates for my Department's 1991-92 running costs which are still being finalised.

Suckler Cow Premium

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to make the recently announced payments of the suckler cow premium.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given on 26 November at column 324 to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

Chief Veterinary Officer's Report

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to publish the report of his chief veterinary officer on animal health for 1990.

Mr. Gummer: My Department is intending to publish the report of the Chief Veterinary Officer—"Animal Health 1990"—on 3 July 1991.

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the loss of 380 jobs at the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The AFRC has announced that an estimated 380 posts will be lost in 1990-91 as a result of a combination of factors, including reductions in commissioned work as a consequence of the Government's "near-market" policy, an anticipated reduction in contracts work from the private sector, and the restructuring of AFRC institutes.

I am confident that the AFRC, which is an independent, chartered body, will continue to make every effort to hold redundancies to a minimum by deploying staff threatened with redundancy to other posts, with retraining as required.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to ensure that slaughterhouses in Northern Ireland meet European Community export standards.

Mr. Brooke: Of the 33 slaughterhouses in Northern Ireland, 27 are already approved for intra-Community trade. Required European Community standards are enforced by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

Grammar Schools (Intake)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision he has made in respect of the intake allowed into grammar schools in Northern Ireland where there is a number of children of Regular Army personnel in the intake and where the number of children in a yearly cohort is affected by the transfer of such children to those schools from elsewhere when their parents are transferred to Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Admissions are a matter for individual school boards of governors, and the children of regular Army personnel resident in Northern Ireland are catered for within the normal arrangements. Schools are required to admit pupils up to their approved admissions number and to apply admissions criteria if they are over-subscribed. The admission of children from schools outside Northern Ireland is also a matter for individual schools, but the Department of Education is prepared to consider applications for an increase in school admissions numbers in cases where there are extenuating circumstances.

Nursery Education

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many places in nursery education are available in *(a)* Belfast city and *(b)* each education and library board area in Northern Ireland; and in each case how many are (i) in the integrated school system, (ii) in controlled schools, (iii) in maintained schools and (iv) in other schools, respectively.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of full-time equivalent nursery pupil places for each education and library board are as follows:

Board area	*Controlled*			*Maintained*			
	Nursery school places	*Nursery classes in primary schools-places*	*Total places*	*Nursery school places*	*Nursery classes in primary schools-places*	*Total places*	*Total places nursery schools and places*
Belfast[1]	700	775	1,475	550	50	600	2,075
Western	500	150	650	—	75	75	725
North-Eastern	725	200	925	100	100	200	1,125
South-Eastern	475	150	625	250	—	250	875
Southern	525	425	950	100	300	400	1,350
Total	2,925	1,700	4,625	1,000	525	1,525	6,150

[1] Coterminous with the Belfast city council area.

There is no grant-aided nursery provision in integrated schools or in other schools.

Government of Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his reply of 28 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *399*, what is meant by the term "Government of Northern Ireland" in note (5) to the table; and to whom in Northern Ireland the present Government are answerable.

Mr. Brooke: The reference in note (5) to the table in my reply of 28 November, is to Northern Ireland Departments which, under the Northern Ireland Act 1974, are subject to my direction and control. The VAT Act 1983 Section (49) provides for refunds to "the Government of Northern Ireland".

WALES

National Library and National Museum

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many visits he has made to *(a)* the national library of Wales and *(b)* the national museum of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend visited the national museum in September and plans to take up the invitation of the president to visit the national library of Wales at an early opportunity.

National Library

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to visit the national library of Wales to meet staff members to discuss the future of the library.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on 31 October which explained the procedures for dealing with staff inspection reports.

Training

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to enhance training in rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The new training and enterprise councils are locally based and run by local employers in partnership with the local community; this will ensure that the needs of a rural economy are catered for effectively. A new all-Wales Agricultural Training Board has been established, with a headquarters at Builth Wells, to meet the training needs of the industry. It will work closely with the TECs and in due course, after the necessary primary legislation, it will be able to extend its remit beyond the strict confines of the agricultural industry.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of day centre and day hospital places for mentally handicapped people in Wales currently; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There were 3,499 places in local authority day care, training and employment facilities for mentally handicapped people on 31 March 1990. At 31 March 1979, there were 2,540 places in local authority adult training centres for mentally handicapped people. The increase between 1979 and 1990 is nearly 38 per cent.

There were 22,484 place-days—that is, the number of places times the number of days the place was available —in NHS day care facilities for mentally handicapped people in the year from 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990. This is equivalent to an average of 62 continuously available places over the year. Comparable information for 1979 is not available.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning appeals were brought in each of the years 1986 to 1989 in relation to each local planning authority in Wales; how many were allowed; and what was the overall cost to his Department of the planning appeal system in each of those years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The numbers of planning appeals brought and allowed are given in the table.

For the financial year 1989-90 the cost of the appeal system was £1,006,200. I regret that figures for earlier years are not available.

District	*1986*		*1987*		*1988*		*1989*	
	A	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
Clwyd								
Alyn and Deeside	16	8	37	9	24	7	30	5
Colwyn	28	9	28	6	25	5	32	10
Delyn	24	2	24	5	25	10	42	12
Glyndwr	19	5	21	5	27	6	36	4
Rhuddlan	22	12	23	9	22	10	32	11
Wrexham Maelor	30	10	31	10	47	14	37	8
Total	139	46	164	44	170	52	109	50
Dyfed								
Carmarthen	22	5	16	4	28	9	56	7
Ceredigion	36	8	31	7	57	8	81	11
Dinefwr	16	6	15	2	16	3	42	5
Llanelli	16	3	30	9	22	9	33	9
Preseli	10	2	19	2	15	5	36	3
South Pembrokeshire	22	5	14	3	21	2	63	11
Total	122	29	125	27	159	36	311	46
Gwent								
Blaenau Gwent	10	2	14	1	7	3	15	6
Islwyn	19	6	19	6	13	5	29	6
Monmouth	59	12	76	12	70	12	105	18
Newport	48	12	37	8	49	6	73	10
Torfaen	36	11	19	6	26	7	33	6
Total	172	43	165	33	165	33	255	46
Gwynedd								
Aberconwy	30	15	51	6	51	14	69	16
Arfon	26	8	34	7	29	3	39	4
Dwyfor	20	3	48	9	41	9	59	16
Meirionnydd	22	9	13	1	25	4	20	0
Ynys Mon	55	17	59	23	56	17	71	18
Total	153	52	205	46	202	47	258	54

District	1986		1987		1988		1989	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Mid Glamorgan								
Cynon Valley	17	3	14	3	18	3	27	7
Merthyr Tydfil	15	5	12	4	19	4	9	4
Ogwr	46	5	41	6	62	8	58	14
Rhondda	19	7	10	0	14	5	29	7
Rhymney Valley	15	1	16	4	16	7	24	5
Taff Ely	43	13	38	6	38	10	56	10
Total	155	34	131	23	167	37	203	47
Powys								
Brecknock	33	9	26	6	28	6	44	7
Montgomery	5	3	7	2	22	5	30	5
Radnor	11	4	5	1	13	4	12	0
Total	49	16	38	9	63	15	86	12
South Glamorgan								
Cardiff	54	20	67	21	73	21	103	36
Vale of Glamorgan	73	22	74	21	55	21	101	32
Total	127	42	141	42	128	42	204	68
West Glamorgan								
Port Talbot (formerly Afan)	4	1	9	1	4	1	4	1
Lliw Valley	20	10	32	6	26	5	31	4
Neath	10	2	11	5	10	3	22	5
Swansea	70	23	58	10	69	22	78	30
Total	104	36	110	22	109	31	135	40

Columns headed 'A' relate to appeals made.
Columns headed 'B' relate to appeals allowed.

Marina, Aberystwyth

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build a marina in Aberystwyth during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Ceredigion district council submitted a scheme for the development of a marina at Aberystwyth harbour as a project of regional or national importance. An announcement on this and other applications will be made in the House shortly.

Textile and Knitwear Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the future of the textile and knitwear industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Several. I am aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has policy responsibility for the textile and knitwear industry, has also received representations. I will ensure that he is aware of any views expressed by the industry in Wales.

Flood Damage

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums from public funds were paid to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* private firms and *(c)* private individuals to repair damage caused by floods in Wales in February; for what purposes such sums were paid; how much of these sums were paid by central Government and for what purposes they were used; and what sums were paid by councils and for what purposes they were used.

Mr. David Hunt: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the formal expression of interest by Pembrokeshire health authority in becoming an all-authority national health service trust.

Mr. David Hunt: No, but if a formal application is submitted, a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total budget of family practitioner committees for the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and the predicted forecast for the year 1990-91; and if he will itemise the family practitioner committee budget breakdown for each health authority for each of the years identified above.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The financial allocations made to family practitioner committees in Wales—re-titled family health services authorities from 17 September 1990) for their administration revenue expenditure are shown in table 1.

Apart from identifying separately the amounts built in for certain fixed costs, over which an FHSA has no discretion, these cash-limited budgets are not disaggregated into discrete items when they are allocated. It is for each FHSA to decide how its administration revenue budget is best used in accordance with statutory requirements and such directions and guidance as might be given to them.

In addition to their administration revenue budgets, FHSAs are responsible with effect from the present financial year, for delegated, cash-limited, budgets covering expenditure on a proportion of general medical practitioners' practice staff and premises costs. These are shown for each FHSA in Wales at table 2.

Table 1
Administration revenue net allocation[1]

FPC/FHSA	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*[2]
Clwyd	429	513	800
Dyfed	387	488	745
Gwent	500	622	920
Gwynedd	312	404	620
Mid Glamorgan	600	710	1,045
Powys	200	287	435
South Glamorgan	615	763	1,040
West Glamorgan	378	462	720

[1] All figures in £'000s.
[2] Latest approximate position; figures continue to be adjusted within year.

Table 2
Delegated budgets for general practitioners staff and premises partial reimbursement[1]

FPC/FHSA	*1990-91*
Clwyd	3,320
Dyfed	3,779
Gwent	4,261
Gwynedd	2,749
Mid Glamorgan	4,610
Powys	1,538
South Glamorgan	3,872
West Glamorgan	2,907

[1] All figures £'000s.

Housing

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest figure for the number of private sector starts in the housing market in Wales; and what has been the increase since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Ten thousand and ninety five private sector starts were recorded during 1989—2,509 or 24·9 per cent. more than the 7,586 started in 1979.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each county in Wales his estimate available of the number of people in that county with problems of alcohol misuse.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The only available data are provided in the Welsh heart health survey of 1985, which recorded people drinking in excess of "safe limits" defined by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales. These are 20-plus units per week for men and 15-plus units for women. The figures are as follows:

Health authority district	*Proportion of population aged 18-64 drinking in excess of the safe limits percentage*	*Estimated number of people aged 18-64 drinking in excess of the safe limits*
Clwyd		
Male	37	29,000
Female	12	5,600
East Dyfed		
Male	36	14,600
Female	15	3,300
Gwent		
Male	43	39,700
Female	10	5,600
Gwynedd		
Male	34	14,900
Female	10	2,700
Mid Glamorgan		
Male	46	53,800
Female	13	8,600
Pembrokeshire		
Male	38	7,700
Female	10	1,200
Powys		
Male	38	8,500
Female	13	1,600
South Glamorgan		
Male	41	35,800
Female	11	6,000
West Glamorgan		
Male	43	33,500
Female	11	5,300

1990 data will become available next year.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the finances available to his Department and allocated by his Department to combat alcohol misuse in each of the financial years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90; if he will indicate the amounts initially available in 1990-91, and any additional sums made available by his Department for this purpose since the start of the financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Responsibility for tackling alcohol misuse rests primarily with health and local authorities. The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has a role in primary prevention and many voluntary organisations participate as part of their overall activity. Finances to these organisations are unhypothecated and it is not possible separately to identify that element earmarked for combating alcohol misuse.

Specific funds are made available to Alcohol Concern Wales and these are as follows:

	£
1987-88	38,187
1988-89	42,000
1989-90	49,546
1990-91	68,079

It was announced in June of this year that an additional £150,000 was available for organisations concerned with combating alcohol misuse.

Teachers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many resignations there have been from the teaching profession in each year between 1985 and 1989, inclusive, in each local education authority area; and if he will publish figures for *(a)* the primary sector and *(b)* the secondary school sector.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 28 November 1990]:* The number of teachers who have moved out of teaching

posts in the maintained education sector is given as follows for the years ending 31 March 1986 to 31 March 1988. Information for 1989 is not yet available, and information prior to 1986 is not readily available.

Year ending 31 March	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1986		
Clwyd	29	60
Dyfed	52	68
Gwent	53	81
Gwynedd	29	36
Mid Glamorgan	56	83
Powys	14	20
South Glamorgan	40	75
West Glamorgan	38	56
Wales	311	479
1987		
Clwyd	21	67
Dyfed	26	54
Gwent	48	76
Gwynedd	23	38
Mid Glamorgan	57	102
Powys	23	17
South Glamorgan	51	68
West Glamorgan	47	58
Wales	296	480
1988		
Clwyd	22	51
Dyfed	50	62
Gwent	58	87
Gwynedd	20	37
Mid Glamorgan	41	91
Powys	17	29
South Glamorgan	45	63
West Glamorgan	61	61
Wales	314	481

Note: Figures exclude those teachers who moved out of posts for the following reasons: death, disbarment, retirement, movement within the maintained education sector in England or Wales, or became part-time. Also, those teachers who entered and left a post within the year March 31 to March 31 are not included.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of members nominated by his Department to represent ethnic minority communities to serve on bodies in Wales during the past three years.

Mr. David Hunt *(holding answer 27 November):* Members are appointed on the basis of their personal qualities and relevant experience and not as representatives of any particular ethnic group. Candidates are not required to state their ethnic origin; consequently, such information is not recorded.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what alternatives to benzodiazepine sleeping pills are currently being provided in national health service hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: The current British national formulary lists seven drugs or chemical groups which are available as alternatives to benzodiazepine hypnotics.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has that pharmaceutical companies are providing incentives to national health service doctors to continue supplying benzodiazepines to patients.

Mr. Dorrell: We have no such evidence.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department is currently doing to ensure that no new patient becomes addicted to benzodiazepines.

Mr. Dorrell: Doctors already have advice about the use of these drugs and are aware of the need to prescribe them carefully. The number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain in 1989 was approximately 9 per cent. smaller than in 1988.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for each individual benzodiazepine were issued by community pharmacists during 1989.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Benzodiazepines
Great Britain: 1989

Drug group	*Prescriptions (millions)*
Temazepam	7·1
Nitrazepam	4·2
Diazepam	4·1
Triazolam	2·1
Lorazepam	1·7
Chlordiazepoxide	0·8
Oxazepam	0·5
Lormetazepam	0·2
Loprazolam	0·2
Clonazepam	0·1
Clobazam	0·1
TOTALS	22·1

These estimates are based on a sample of prescriptions of approximately 1 in 200 in England and Wales and 1 in 100 in Scotland which were dispensed by community pharmacists.

Residential and Nursing Homes (Touting)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on touting for business on health authority property by agents for residential and nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales gave him on 22 November at column *193* and 30 November at column *517*. I am not aware of any such problems elsewhere.

Pollen

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's review of the possible impact of vehicle gases on the potency of pollen grains.

Mr. Dorrell: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 17 July at column *514*.

Agency Staff

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the percentage of agency nurses employed by the national health service at the present time.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available information relates to 30 September 1989 and shows that agency nursing and midwifery staff accounted for less than 2 per cent. of the total wholetime equivalent nursing and midwifery staff employed in the national health service in England.

NHS Trusts

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which national health service trusts he intends to establish; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: National health service trusts are a central element in our plans for reforming the NHS and improving the services which it provides to patients. While remaining firmly a part of the NHS, trusts will have wide ranging and significant powers of self-determination which will enable them to deliver high quality patient care and to provide greater job satisfaction to their employees.

The trust initiative has already attracted considerable interest from those working within the NHS. Last year some 86 hospitals and other units indicated that they were considering applying to become operational on 1 April 1991. Staff from the management executive worked closely with these units while they were deciding whether to apply for trust status and during the preparation of their applications. During this period a number of units decided not to go ahead with a formal application for trust status on this occasion.

Sixty-six hospitals and other units formally applied for trust status, and regional health authorities have consulted widely on these applications. I have now considered these applications and the comments made on them during the consultation period by those consulted and others. In doing so, I applied four key criteria: that the establishment of a Trust will give clear benefits and improved quality of service to patients; that management has the skills and capacity—including strong, effective leadership, sufficient financial and personnel management expertise and adequate information systems—to run the unit effectively; that senior professional staff, especially consultants, are involved in the management of the unit; that the trust will be financially viable. As a result, I have decided to establish the following 56 trusts, to become operational on 1 April 1991.

Northern RHA
Northumbria Ambulance NHS Trust
Newcastle Mental Health NHS Trust
The Freeman Group of Hospitals NHS Trust

Yorkshire RHA
Leeds General Infirmary and Associated Hospitals NHS Trust
St. James's University Hospital NHS Trust
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust

Trent RHA
Northern General Hospital NHS Trust
Lincolnshire Ambulance and Health Transport Service NHS Trust
Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital NHS Trust

East Anglian RHA
Norfolk Ambulance NHS Trust
Anglian Harbours NHS Trust

North East Thames RHA
Southend Health Care NHS Trust
The Royal London Hospital and Associated Community Services NHS Trust
The Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust
The Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital NHS Trust
The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust

North West Thames RHA
North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
Mount Vernon Hospital NHS Trust
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust
Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust

South East Thames RHA
The Guy's and Lewisham NHS Trust

South West Thames RHA
Lifecare NHS Trust
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust
Homewood NHS Trust
The St. Helier NHS Trust
Croydon Community NHS Trust
Epsom Health Care NHS Trust
The Royal Surrey County and St. Luke's Hospitals NHS Trust

South Western RHA
Weston Area NHS Trust
East Somerset NHS Trust
East Gloucestershire NHS Trust
Cornwall Community Healthcare NHS Trust
The United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Mental Handicap NHS Trust
South Devon Health Care NHS Trust
Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust

Wessex RHA
The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Trust
West Dorset Mental Health NHS Trust
The West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust
West Dorset Community Health NHS Trust

Oxford RHA
Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust

West Midlands RHA
First Community NHS Trust
The Mental Health Foundation of Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust
The Rugby NHS Trust
Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust

Mersey RHA
The Wirral Hospital NHS Trust
The Royal Liverpool University Hospital NHS Trust
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital Services NHS Trust
Chester and Halton Community NHS Trust
The Cardiothoracic Centre—Liverpool NHS Trust
Broadgreen Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital and Community Services NHS Trust
The Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust

North Western RHA
Manchester Central Hospitals and Community Care NHS Trust
Christie Hospital NHS Trust

Establishment orders for these trusts will be made forthwith and the trusts will be established later this month to run in shadow form for a period of some three months before taking up their full responsibilities on 1 April 1991.

We shall be setting the external financing limit for each trust shortly. In doing this, we shall take account both of the overall resources available and of the plans which trusts have set out. Inevitably, this will involve difficult decisions, as it will not be possible to meet all trusts' capital aspirations next year. As has been made clear in the past, our first priority will be to ensure funding for those schemes which Trusts could otherwise expect to be funded from regions' capital programmes next year had the trusts remained under health authority management.

I believe that the following eight applications have the potential to become successful trusts and hope in time they will do so.

Newcastle General Hospital
The City and Hackney Health District
Harefield Hospital
North West Hertfordshire Priority Services Unit
St. Thomas' Hospital
Bromley Priority Health Services Unit
Bromley Acute Services Unit
Mid Downs West Unit (Crawley Hospital)

However, I consider that, in view of the very significant management tasks they face it would not be right to establish them now as trusts, with the substantial responsibilities as well as benefits which trust status confers. I realise that my decision will come as a deep disappointment to them. I am writing to each of them today setting out the reasons for my decision and I hope that, if they are able to demonstrate that they have satisfactorily addressed these issues, I shall be able to establish them as trusts to come into operation in April 1992.

Following recent changes to the project management team of the potential trust, the sponsors of the proposed North Devon healthcare trust believe that it would be preferable that I defer the establishment of the trust at present. They remain committed to trust status but believe it would be sensible to give the new management team more time to establish itself and win local support. I have no doubt that the proposed trust has the potential to deliver benefits to local people, but I agree entirely that it would be sensible for me not to establish the trust at present.

The sponsors of the proposed Brighton hospitals trust have also asked that their application should be deferred. I have agreed to this request. I have no doubt that Brighton has the potential to become a successful trust in the future.

Meanwhile, we are already embarking on the process of responding to the many expressions of interest in a second wave of potential trusts to become operational on 1 April 1992. I am delighted to report that there is great interest in this, and I have today agreed that the 111 hospitals and other units listed, which have expressed interest in trust status, can proceed to work up applications to become trusts on 1 April 1992.

Northern RHA
Cleveland Ambulance Service
Darlington Health Services
Gateshead Community Unit
Gateshead Mental Health
Northgate Hospital Northumberland
North West Durham Hospital and Community Services
North Tees Acute and Community Services
Royal Victoria and Dental Hospital Newcastle upon Tyne
South Tees Acute Hospital Services

Yorkshire RHA
Airedale Health Services
Bradford Mental Health and Community Services
Harrogate Health Services
Northallerton Health Services
Scarborough Health Services

Trent RHA
Barnsley Community and Priority Services Unit
Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Services
City Hospital Nottingham
Doncaster Community Development Unit
Doncaster Priority Care Services Unit
South Sheffield Hospital Unit
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Nottingham Community Unit
Nottingham Mental Health Unit
Childrens Hospital Sheffield
South Lincolnshire Mental Handicap Services
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service
University Hospital Nottingham
Weston Park Hospital, Sheffield

East Anglian RHA
East Suffolk Community Unit
Huntingdon Acute Unit Hinchingbrook Hospital Huntingdon
Huntingdon Community Unit
Papworth Hospital, Huntingdon
West Norfolk and Wisbech Community Unit

North West Thames RHA
Barnet Community Health Services
Barnet General Hospitals
Ealing Community Health Services
East Hertfordshire Acute, Priority and Community Services
Harrow Acute Unit—Northwick Park Hospital
Harrow Community Services
Hillingdon Primary and Community Health Services
North West Hertfordshire Mental Handicap
South Bedfordshire Community and Mental Health Services
South Bedfordshire General Hospitals
Parkside Mental Health Unit

North East Thames RHA
Basildon and Thurrock Acute Services
Basildon and Thurrock Community
Essex Ambulance Service
Mid Essex Acute
North East Essex Acute
North East Essex Mental Handicap Unit Turner Village
North East Essex Mental Illness (Severals Hospital)
Oldchurch and Rush Green Hospitals
Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital
Harold Wood Health Services
Southend Priority Services

South East Thames RHA
Bexley Acute and Community
Bexley Mental Health and Mental Handicap Services
Brighton Community and Mental Health Services
Camberwell Provider Unit
Dartford and Gravesham Acute Unit
Thameslink HealthCare Trust
Eastbourne Community Services Unit
Hastings Provider Services
Lewisham Community Services
Maidstone Acute and Community Unit
Maidstone Mental Handicap
Tunbridge Wells Mental Handicap Services
Queen Victoria Hospital East Grinstead
West Lambeth Priority Services

South West Thames RHA
East Surrey Acute and Community
East Surrey Mental Illness and Mental Handicap
Frimley Park Hospital
Merton and Sutton Mental Handicap and Community Unit
Mid Surrey Mental Handicap
Mid Surrey Mental Illness
North West Surrey Acute

North West Surrey Community

Wessex RHA
Bath Mental Health Unit
Bournemouth and Christchurch Acute Unit
Poole Acute Unit
East Dorset Community Services

Oxford RHA
Aylesbury Vale Priority Care Services Unit
Horton General Hospital
Kettering Priority Services Unit
Milton Keynes Acute and Maternity Services Unit
Milton Keynes Community and Mental Health Services Unit
West Berkshire Mental Health Unit
Wexham Park Hospital
Wycombe Health Services

South Western RHA
Avon Ambulance Service
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Acute and General Services
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service
Plymouth Community Unit

West Midlands RHA
Coventry Walsgrave Health Services
East Birmingham Acute
Good Hope Hospital
Herefordshire Community Services Unit
South East Staffordshire Community and Mental Health Unit
South Warwickshire Community and Handicap Services Unit

Mersey RHA
Aintree Hospitals Trust (Walton and Fazakerly)
Liverpool Obstetrics and Gynaecology Unit
Mersey Regional Centre for Radiotherapy and Oncology
St. Helens and Knowsley Community Unit
Southport and Formby Acute Hospitals Unit
Mersey Regional Centre for Medical and Surgical Neurology
Macclesfield Acute Services
Macclesfield Community Services

North Western RHA
Burnley Provider Unit
Oldham Acute and Community Services
Rochdale Acute and Community Services
Wrightington Health Services

These expressions of interest do not commit the hospitals or other units to applying for Trust status.

The following four expressions of interest have been received from colleges of nursing.

Colleges of Nursing
Avon College of Health Studies
South West College of Health Studies
Normanby College of Health Care Studies
Portsmouth Education Services

I shall be considering further how best these colleges can achieve the flexible management arrangements they desire in the future.

I believe that the scale of the response to the trust initiative shows the very real enthusiasm of those working in the NHS to take advantage of the benefits of trust status and, over time, I expect to see trust status becoming the natural model for all units providing patient care.

Delighted as I am at the real success of the trust initiative I should emphasise that it forms only a part, albeit a very major part, of our overall programme of reform of the NHS. That programme is making steady progress. When trusts become operational, they will do so as part of a radically changed NHS, in which there is a clear separation between purchasers and providers of care and a system of contracting which will begin to achieve a closer match between resources and needs and will help to drive forward further improvements in quality and value for money. The first wave of GP fund holders will be able to exert greater influence over the care their patients receive. Medical audit will be in place across the NHS. These developments, put in place in a relatively short time, taken together, will represent an immense achievement by those working in the NHS and will enable the service as a whole to deliver significant improvements in patient care.

Hospital and Ward Closures

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list hospital and ward closures in each district in Herefordshire since 1987.

Mr. Dorrell: The following hospital in Herefordshire was approved for closure:

Year	*Hospital/ Facility*
1989	Old Priory

Information on ward closures is not held centrally.

Drugs

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the illnesses for sufferers of which drugs are available free of charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: People who suffer from one or more of the following medical conditions are entitled to claim exemption from all NHS prescription charges:

A permanent fistula which requires continuous surgical dressing or an appliance.

Epilepsy for which continuous anti-convulsive therapy is essential.

A continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving home without the help of another person.

Diabetes mellitus, except where treatment is by diet alone

Myxodema (hypothyroidism).

Hypoparathyroidism.

Diabetes insipidus or other forms of hypopituitarism.

Forms of hypoadrenalism (including Addison's disease for which specific substitution therapy is essential.

Myasthenia gravis.

In addition, there are extensive general exemption arrangements which are designed to protect those who are likely to have difficulty in paying charges. Anyone who is not exempt, but who needs a lot of prescriptions, is able to limit their outlay by buying a prepayment certificate ("season ticket"). As a result of these arrangements, a charge is paid on less than one in five items dispensed.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated annual cost of the free provision of drugs for patients suffering from life-threatening cancer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available.

Hospitals

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for national health service hospitals to provide a casualty service at a lower level of service than a full accident and emergency unit.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities determine the level of accident and emergency services they consider necessary to meet the needs of their population and thereafter make suitable arrangements for such provision.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the regulations and guidelines which influence staffing levels and related issues in national health service hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no regulations or standards set centrally on staffing levels in the national health service.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Accountants' Pay

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many accountants in the Treasury received pay increases in excess of 29 per cent. in the pay settlement years 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990, taken individually.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are no instances of accountants in the Treasury receiving increases in excess of 29 per cent. in respect of any of the pay settlement years 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

CIVIL SERVICE

House of Commons Disqualification Act

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what arrangements are to be made to provide hon. Members with information about the amendments contained in the resolution tabled on 26 November updating schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act.

Mr. Renton: A detailed explanatory note on the revised resolution tabled on 3 December is available from the Vote Office.

Agency Status

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list in the *Official Report* all the executive agencies that have been established, their parent Department, the date on which they were established and the numbers of staff employed.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* The current list of established executive agencies is as follows, together with their parent Departments, date of establishment and staff employed:

Agency name	*Parent department*	*Date of establishment*	*Staff numbers*[1]
Building Research Establishment	Environment	2 April 1990	680
Central Office of Information	—[2]	5 April 1990	740
Central Veterinary Laboratory	Agriculture	2 April 1990	560
Civil Service College	Office of the Minister for the Civil Service	6 June 1989	200
Companies House	Trade and Industry	3 October 1988	1,100
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Transport	2 April 1990	5,300
Driving Standards Agency	Transport	2 April 1990	2,100
Employment Service	Employment	2 April 1990	33,800
Historic Royal Palaces	Environment	1 October 1989	330
Her Majesty's Stationery Office	—[2]	14 December 1988	3,200
Hydrographic Office[3]	Defence	6 April 1990	890
Information Technology Services Agency	Social Security	2 April 1990	2,900
Insolvency Service	Trade and Industry	21 March 1990	1,400
Intervention Board	—[2]	2 April 1990	860
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	Trade and Industry	30 October 1989	320
Land Registry	—[2]	2 July 1990	10,800
Meteorological Office	Defence	2 April 1990	2,250
National Engineering Laboratory	Trade and Industry	5 October 1990	520
National Physical Laboratory	Trade and Industry	3 July 1990	830
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	Trade and Industry	18 April 1989	50
Natural Resources Institute	Overseas Development Administration	2 April 1990	330
Occupational Health Service	Office of the Minister for the Civil Service	2 April 1990	100
Ordnance Survey	—[2]	1 May 1990	2,550
Patent Office	Trade and Industry	1 March 1990	1,150
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	Environment	6 July 1989	60
Radiocommunications Agency	Trade and Industry	2 April 1990	460
Registers of Scotland	—[2]	6 April 1990	1,000
Resettlement Agency	Social Security	24 May 1989	530
Royal Mint	Chancellor	2 April 1990	970
Training and Employment Agency	Northern Ireland	2 April 1990	1,700
Vehicle Certification Agency	Transport	2 April 1990	70
Vehicle Inspectorate	Transport	1 August 1988	1,600
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	Agriculture	2 April 1990	70
Warren Spring Laboratory	Trade and Industry	20 April 1989	300
34 in number			79,720

[1] Figures based on staff in post as at 1 April 1990.
[2] Indicates an Agency which is an independent Government Department.
[3] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list in the *Official Report* all those units of central government that are under consideration for agency status, their parent Department, the target date for establishment as an agency and the numbers of staff employed.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* The current list of activities announced as candidates for agency status, together with their parent departments and staff employed is as follows. Target dates for the establishment of these activities are a matter for the responsible Minister.

Candidate Name	*Parent Department*	*Staff number*[1]
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	Welsh Office	220
Central Science Laboratory	Agriculture	400
Central Statistical Office	[2]	1,000
Chessington Computer Centre	Treasury	430
Child Support Agency	Social Security	Not Known
Civil Service Commission (The Recruitment Agency)	Office of the Minister for the Civil Service	340
Defence Research Agency	Defence	11,700
Directorate General of Defence Accounts[3]	Defence	2,100
Farm and Countryside Service	Agriculture	2,550
Fisheries Protection Services	Scottish Office	170
Forensic Science Service	Home Office	580
Fuel Suppliers Branch	Environment	30
Historic Scotland	Scottish Office	570
Military Survey[3]	Defence	850
NHS Estates	Health	130
Passport Office	Home Office	1,200
Planning Inspectorate	Environment	550
Pollution Inspectorate	Environment	210
Property Holdings	Environment	1,600
RAF Training[3]	Defence	2,500
Royal Parks	Environment	570
Service Children's Schools[3]	Defence	1,000
Social Security Benefits Agency	Social Security	68,200
Social Security Contributions Unit	Social Security	6,200
Valuation Office	Inland Revenue	5,700
Youth Treatment Service	Health	220
Ordnance Survey	Northern Ireland	200
Rating Division	Northern Ireland	270
Social Security Operations 29 in number	Northern Ireland	5,000
Customs and Excise[4]	[2]	26,900
Inland Revenue[4] (excluding Valuation Office)	[2]	60,400
		[5]201,790

[1] Figures based on staff in post as at 1 April 1990.
[2] Indicates an agency candidate which is an independent Government Department.
[3] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.
[4] Moving towards operating fully on next steps lines, as set out in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement of 25 July 1990.
[5] Plus numbers in the Child Support Agency, when known.

Many other areas of government are under consideration, including prisons, and other parts of the Ministry of defence.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Broadcasting Ownership

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is in a position to announce the supplementary ownership rules which he proposes to implement by order under schedule 2 of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The ownership rules will contain the following provisions:

(a) it will be permissible for one body to hold a controlling interest in two regional Channel 3 licences as long as they are not both large. Of the 15 regional Channel 3 areas, we shall designate the top nine (in terms of NAR share) as large, and the bottom six as small.

(b) in relation to regional Channel 3, national Channel 3 and Channel 5 licences, where a person owns two licences (in the case of regional Channel 3) or one licence (in the case of national Channel 3 or Channel 5) he will be permitted to have a maximum of a 20 per cent. stake in *one* further such licence, and a maximum stake of 5 per cent. in any further licences.

(c) where a person has no controlling interest in any licence, he will nevertheless be permitted to have more than a 20 per cent. interest in two regional or one national licence, a maximum of a 20 per cent. interest in one further such licence and a maximum of a 5 per cent. interest in any further licences.

(d) national newspaper proprietors will not be permitted to have more than a 20 per cent. interest in any local radio licence. No national or local newspaper proprietor will be permitted to have more than a 20 per cent. interest in a domestic satellite service licence.

(e) no public telecommunications operator will be permitted to have a controlling interest in any Channel 3, Channel 5, national radio or domestic satellite licence.

(f) there will be a points scheme to indicate the maximum ownership permitted of local radio stations. All stations (with their associated channels) will be awarded points on the basis of their audience reach. It will be permissible to own stations which correspond to a maximum of 15 per cent. of the total number of points in the system.

I have placed a more detailed set of proposals in the Library. I hope to place an Order before the House in December.

Deportation

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been deported after serving sentences in British prisons for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Figures in the form requested have been held centrally only since September 1986.

The figures in the table relate to deportations under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971, where recommendation for deportation made by a court was part of a custodial sentence, and under section 3(5)*(b)* of that Act where deportation on conducive grounds was deemed to be appropriate following a custodial sentence.

	Section 3(6)	*Section 3(5)(b)*	*Total*
1987	38	3	41
1988	52	9	61
1989	69	6	75

Prisoners (Suicides)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides for (i) prisoners and (ii) those on remand in prison for each year for 1985 to 1989.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of deaths at their own hand of inmates at Her Majesty's prison service establishments for each year from 1985 to 1989 is shown in the table. A figure is also given for the number of incidents of self-injury in 1989 which were regarded as attempted suicide. Information about the status of inmates who attempted suicide is not readily available. Only partial information is available on the number of suicide attempts in earlier years.

Number of deaths at own hand of inmates at Her Majesty's Prison Service establishments 1985-1989

Year	*Deaths at Own Hand*[1] *Unconvicted*	*Convicted*	*Total*	*Attempted suicides*
1985	19(16)	10(7)	29(23)	—
1986	14(12)	7(5)	21(17)	—
1987	[2]29(28)	17(14)	46(42)	—
1988	21(19)	16(12)	37(31)	—
1989	27(18)	21(16)	48(34)	543

[1] The figures in brackets denote number of deaths for which a verdict of suicide was returned at the coroner's inquest.
[2] Includes one inmate who was detained under the Immigration Act and who was not therefore on remand.

Electoral Records

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the legal provisions in addition to the Representation of the People Act 1983 which entitle a person to obtain access to the parliamentary ballot papers and counterfoils and the marked electoral registers, returns, declarations and other election documents in the custody of a returning officer or the Clerk of the Crown.

Mrs. Rumbold: The only statutory provisions concerning the retention of, access to and disposal of the documents used at a parliamentary election are those laid down in schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Shotguns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many semi-automatic and pump action shotguns have been certified as shotguns after being modified from section 1 firearms classification under the terms of the Firearms Act 1988, up until the latest available date or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the masters of the proof houses that, to date, approximately 47,000 adapted smooth-bore guns have been certified by the proof houses so as to enable the guns to be retained on a shot gun certificate. 30,000 of these were dealt with in Birmingham and the remainder in London.

Open Prisons (Escapes)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners convicted of drug and drug-related offences have absconded from open prisons in each of the past three years; how many were recaptured; and which open prisons were involved.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Vagrancy Act

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* prosecuted and convicted in the Metropolitan and City of London police districts in the year ended December 1989 under the Vagrancy Act 1824 for (i) begging and (ii) sleeping out, *(b)* prosecuted and convicted in the rest of England and Wales in the same period for the same offences; and how many people at *(a)* and *(b)* above (1) were fined, (2) received custodial sentences, (3) served custodial sentences in default of payment of fines, (4) received conditional discharges and (5) received probation orders, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: The information available is given in the table. Figures are not available separately for receptions into prison service establishments in default of payment of a fine for offences of begging and sleeping out.

Number of persons proceeded against for begging and sleeping out offences under Vagrancy Act 1824 in the Metropolitan Police District[1] and remainder of England and Wales by result 1989

	Total proceeded against	*Total found guilty*	*Total for sentence*	*Sentence* *Conditional discharge*	*Fine*	*Probation order*	*Immediate custody*	*Other*
Metropolitan Police District[1]								
Begging	1,256	1,193	1,193	326	841	3	—	23
Sleeping out	12	10	10	—	10	—	—	—
Remainder of England and Wales								
Begging	146	126	126	37	87	—	—	2
Sleeping out	12	6	6	2	3	—	—	1

	Total proceeded against	Total found guilty	Total for sentence	Conditional discharge	Fine	Sentence Probation order	Immediate custody	Other
England and Wales								
Begging	1,402	1,319	1,319	363	928	3	—	25
Sleeping out	24	16	16	2	13	—	—	1

[1]Including the City of London.

Anti-Semitic Incidents

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether statistics are kept on incidents of an anti-Semitic nature; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Metropolitan police maintain specific statistics on anti-semitic incidents as part of their records on all racially motivated attacks. Other police forces collect statistics on racial attacks without separate identification of the ethnicity of all victims. The Government remain committed to taking effective action against all forms of racial violence. The desecration of Jewish cemeteries is a particularly distressing example of such behaviour.

The Government and the Association of Chief Police Officers are keeping the situation under constant review, and have had meetings with the Board of Deputies of British Jews to assess the problem. Police forces are aware of the importance of effective liaison with local Jewish community groups, and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is monitoring the position closely.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the finances available to his Department and/or allocated by his Department to combat alcohol misuse in each of the financial years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90, and indicate the amounts initially available in 1990-91, and any additional sums made available by his Department for this purpose since the start of the financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I will write to the hon. Member.

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to make an order bringing into force section 13 of the Football Spectators Act.

Mr. John Patten: I will write to the hon. Member.

PC Blakelock (Murder)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has completed his review of the cases of the three persons convicted of the murder of Police Constable Blakelock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have been considering very carefully a number of representations which have been made to me about the case of Mr. Mark Braithwaite, Mr. Engin Raghip and Mr. Winston Silcott. Each was convicted of murder and riot.

I would normally only consider intervening in a case if there were presented to me some new evidence or other consideration of substance which had not previously been before the courts and which might cast doubts on the safety of the conviction.

Amongst the matters submitted to me was a statement from a psychologist who had, at the request of the defence, assessed Mr. Raghip's mental condition before his trial. The psychologist now says that, in the light of subsequent tests carried out by another psychologist, he now regards the assessment which he then made of Mr. Raghip's mental condition as mistaken. He now takes the view that had he, at the time of the trial, been aware of the later findings of the other psychologist whose tests were carried out in what he regards as more appropriate circumstances than those which he himself had encountered, he would have agreed that Mr. Raghip possessed a significant degree of mental incapacity, suggestibility and compliance.

The psychologist's changed view amounts to fresh material which I think it right that the Court of Appeal should have the opportunity to consider.

Accordingly, in the exercise of my powers under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, I have today referred the case of Engin Raghip to the Court of Appeal for determination in respect of conviction. Under the provisions of that section, his case now falls to be treated for all purposes as an appeal to the court by Mr. Raghip himself, and it will be for those representing Mr. Raghip to seek to raise with the Court of Appeal any matters which they feel may be of relevance to his appeal.

I have also looked very carefully at the representations made on behalf of Mr. Mark Braithwaite and Mr. Winston Silcott, but I have found no grounds on which I would be justified in taking any action to intervene in respect of their convictions. I am, however, always prepared to consider any further representations about the safety of these convictions.

Independent Programmes (Rights)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he now proposes in the light of the conclusion of the Director General of Fair Trading that he would not be making a formal reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the subject of the acquisition by broadcasters of rights in indpendently produced programmes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Concern has been expressed about the common practice of broadcasters who require independent producers to assign their rights in programmes to them. In April 1990, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry asked the Director General of Fair Trading to consider whether action under competition legislation would be justified.

After detailed investigation, the Director General advised that there was no justification for a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He found that broadcasters typically take all the rights because they provide 100 per cent. funding, and thus take all the risks. Channel 4 indicated that they were always willing to contemplate contracts which conferred exploitation rights on the independent producer, with some offsetting adjustments in funding. The director general concluded,

however, that in practice few independents could offer a share of costs in exchange for rights, but that this was not the fault of the broadcasters, who were not thereby abusing their dominant power.

In the light of this advice, we see no case for further investigation or for statutory intervention, either through primary legislation or through the Order to be made under section 16(5) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 which will define independent production. Intervention would have serious implications for broadcasting and competition policy, copyright law and practice, and United Kingdom trade, and the Government are not convinced that it would be beneficial. Its effects on the broadcasters and independent producers themselves in a time of change and increasing competition cannot be foreseen.

The issue is not, however, necessarily closed for ever. The market in independent productions will inevitably change as the 25 per cent. quota takes effect and new broadcasters play a greater part in the market. An investigation under competition legislation is always a possibility if abuses emerge and the criteria for investigation are met.

Rates (Non-payment)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give, broken down into the smallest district or region available, the numbers of people *(a)* arrested and *(b)* imprisoned for non-payment of (i) domestic and (ii) industrial and commercial rates in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The only readily available information is on prisoners committed for non-payment of rates of all types. This is published annually in "Prison statistics England and Wales" (table 6.3 of the latest volume, for 1989, Cm 1221), copies of which are in the Library.

Details of the local authority area are not recorded centrally. However, the table gives details, for 1989, of the counties in which the committing courts are situated. Similar information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Persons received into prison service establishments in England and Wales having been committed to custody for non-payment of rates: by county of court committing, 1989

	Number
Magistrates' court (county):	
Avon	5
Bedford	3
Berkshire	1
Cambridgeshire	1
Cheshire	6
Cornwall	1
Derbyshire	6
Devonshire	1
Dorsetshire	1
East Sussex	2
Essex	6
Greater London	23
Greater Manchester	5
Hertfordshire	1
Humberside	8
Kent	1
Lancashire	1
Leicestershire	1
Merseyside	6
Norfolk	1
Northumberland	1
North Yorkshire	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Shropshire	2
Somerset	1
South Yorkshire	6
Staffordshire	6
Suffolk	1
West Midland	12
West Yorkshire	16
Wiltshire	1
Court not recorded	69
All courts	197

Prisons

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young people aged *(a)* 15 years and *(b)* 16 years were remanded in custody at Swansea prison in each of the last three years;

(2) how many young people aged *(a)* 15 years and *(b)* 16 years were remanded in custody at Cardiff prison in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* The readily available information is given in the table.

Males aged under 17 remanded into prison service establishments who were first received on remand into Cardiff or Swansea prisons: by age and establishment 1987-89

Establishment	*1987*		*1988*		[1] *1989*	
	15	*16*	*15*	*16*	*15*	*16*
Cardiff	8	26	10	32	16	31
Swansea	6	23	9	9	11	8

[1] Provisional figures.

ENVIRONMENT

Toxic Waste

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for the last available year *(a)* the amount of toxic waste imported in total and by port and *(b)* the country of origin and destination of toxic waste imports by port, together with the nature of the toxic waste in each case.

Mr. Baldry: The information in respect of imports through English ports for the year to 31 March 1990 is shown in the following table.

I will write to the hon. Member about the second part of his question.

Similar information in respect of imports to Wales was given in the reply by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on 22 November at columns 191-194.

Imports of toxic waste

Port	Amount (tonnes)
Chatham	409
Dartford	1,137
Dover	5,160
Felixstowe	8,718
Fleetwood	154
Flixborough	4,237
Gravesend	25
Grimsby	39
Harwich	150
Heysham	724
Immingham	8,752
Ipswich	185
Liverpool	754
Middlesbrough	203
Poole	30
Portsmouth	2
Purfleet	12
Ramsgate	1,877
Seaforth	73
Southampton	5
Teesport	83
Tilbury	16
Great Yarmouth	8
GRAND TOTAL	32,751

City Grant

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any projects and amounts of city grant which has been given for housing purposes.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows. In addition to the grants listed, a further £4·5 million has been approved for mixed use developments which include a housing element.

City grant for housing projects as at 3 December 1990

Local authority area and name of project	Grant approved £	Total project cost £	Number of dwellings
Birmingham			
Bordsley Village Initiative	3,720,603	14,711,103	264
Bordsley Village, Phase 1	1,401,257	6,602,014	118
Browning Street Ladywood	902,000	4,277,000	103
Blackburn			
Queens Park Deck Flats, Blackburn	738,620	4,038,620	90
Housing and Urban Park, Lower Audley	1,209,000	7,216,885	138
Bennington Street Housing, Lower Audley	707,000	4,284,000	70
Atlantic Mill Site	377,123	1,885,123	49
London Road, Blackburn	688,407	3,840,407	61
Bolton			
Park/Persian Mill, Bolton Mk2	398,233	3,367,638	72
Prospect Mills Housing	649,773	2,242,773	75
Woodside Mills	550,983	4,486,983	96
Frederick Street, Farnworth	202,820	1,968,820	75
Breightmet Housing Estate, Bolton	284,600	2,826,600	70
Stretton Road Housing, Bolton	308,000	2,188,000	71
Rose Hill Bolton	559,987	3,042,987	67
Bradford			
Lower Grange, Bradford	2,652,707	13,465,207	308
Midland Road, Bradford	136,860	856,860	24
Holroyd Hill/Wibsey Bank	700,000	5,236,000	106
Bristol			
24-32 Wilson Street, Housing, Bristol	293,416	1,253,916	26
Calderdale			
Abbey Park	364,516	2,361,516	75
Coventry			
Harnall Lane Housing, Coventry	592,000	3,667,046	67
Gateshead			
Moore Street Gateshead	30,750	241,150	7
Hartlepool			
Owton Manor, Hartlepool	570,000	2,024,000	90
Manchester			
Portland Mews, Manchester	451,000	2,358,000	66
Every Street Housing Scheme	456,615	2,130,615	60
Bell Crescent Housing, Manchester	621,700	2,995,700	80
Newcastle			
Cowgate Renewal Project, Newcastle	564,885	2,186,885	81
Dorrington Road Flats	1,087,000	3,904,400	110

Local authority area and name of project	Grant approved £	Total project cost £	Number of dwellings
North Tyneside			
Grosvenor Mews, North Shields	64,620	317,620	10
Coach Lane, North Shields	88,892	531,492	22
Nottingham			
Bitterlings Factory Redevelopment, Mk2, Nottingham	93,123	556,123	15
Plymouth			
Camden Street Housing, Plymouth	45,000	326,687	8
Jubilee Terrace Housing, Plymouth	130,766	723,766	15
Rotherham			
Roger Street Development	169,654	1,107,154	34
Salford			
Hazel Avenue and Acme Mill Housing Development	580,000	3,495,000	97
Brandsby Gardens, Salford	100,000	685,250	15
Kersal Vale, Salford (Riverdale)	5,152,000	31,354,000	483
Sandwell			
Windmill Lane, Smethwick	775,000	3,061,000	87
South Tyneside			
Mowbray Court South Shields	100,693	512,193	14
St. Helens			
Green Bank, Ravenhead	6,330,000	25,680,000	309
Sunderland			
Baronshill Housing Phase 2, Sunderland	553,072	2,623,072	72
Baronshill	438,445	1,554,445	48
Ascot Court, Sunderland, Phase 4	54,910	362,710	11
Gilley Law, Sunderland	1,221,447	5,340,447	149
Ascot Court, Phase 3, Farringdon	100,806	503,806	24
Wigan			
Worsley Mesnes Housing, Wigan	1,724,958	7,687,458	126
Totals	38,943,241	196,082,471	4,058

SCOTLAND

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to Greater Glasgow health board of the management authority's review of its acute services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Greater Glasgow health board's review of its acute services involves a wide range of the board's medical and administrative staff. It would be impossible to cost their work on the strategy separately from their other duties.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each of the last 12 months the total number of agency nursing staff employed by the Greater Glasgow health board both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of trained nurses.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not available centrally.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the finances available to his Department and/or allocated by his Department to combat alcohol misuse in each of the financial years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 and indicate the amounts initially available in 1990-91, and any additional sums made available by his Department for this purpose since the start of the financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In addition to research and the general allocations made to health boards, the Scottish Home and Health Department provides grant support to the Scottish Council on Alcohol, the national voluntary organisation concerned with alcohol problems, and funds the Scottish Health Education Group. The Scottish Education Department gives grants to voluntary and other organisations under sections 9 and 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the Industry Department for Scotland supports local alcohol-related projects under the urban programme. In addition, the Scottish Home and Health Department and the Scottish Education Department jointly fund the alcohol studies centre at Paisley college of technology. Expenditure in the last three financial years and estimated expenditure in 1990-91 is set out in the table below. No additional allocations have been made in 1990-91 since the start of the financial year.

Funding provided by Scottish Office specifically to combat alcohol misuse

	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £
Scottish Council on Alcohol	120,000	133,000	120,000	116,000
Alcohol Studies Centre	76,600	87,200	89,300	124,400
Grants under Sections 9 & 10 of Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968	75,500	37,700	80,100	256,600
Grants under Urban Programme	400,600	335,000	369,100	258,800
Scottish Health Education Group	213,800	205,400	276,100	340,000
Total	886,500	798,300	934,600	1,095,800

Historic Buildings

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the total Government expenditure on the upkeep, care and protection of historic buildings and monuments in Scotland in each year since 1980.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* Gross expenditure by the Scottish Development Department on the conservation and presentation of historic buildings and monuments (including the royal parks) in Scotland since 1980 was as follows:

	£ million
1980-81	4·983
1981-82	6·696
1982-83	6·850
1983-84	7·924
1984-85	8·610
1985-86	9·801
1986-87	9·681
1987-88	12·225
1988-89	14·775
1989-90	18·608

Planned gross expenditure in 1990-91 is £19·8 million.

Steel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any representations from British Steel about its long-term plans for the quench and temper facility at Clydesdale and the finishing facility at the Imperial works.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* When my right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of British Steel, he told him that British Steel intended, subject to concluding satisfactory arrangements, to continue operations at the Imperial works. Imperial would be supplied with lower cost pipe from abroad, some of which would be heat treated initially at the quench and temper plant at Clydesdale.

Erskine Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take concerning finances of the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* Arrangements for the financing of the bridge beyond the end of the tolling period in 1991 are under consideration. No decision has yet been taken.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to *(a)* end or *(b)* increase tolls on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest figure for overall operating deficit on Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* The latest published account for 1988-89 shows an operating surplus for the year of £971,208.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to write off accumulated debt on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* Future financing arrangements for the Erskine bridge are under consideration.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest accumulated debt on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* The figure shown as the accumulated deficiency in the latest published account for 1988-89 is £84,889,183.

TRANSPORT

A20

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress made since January in implementing the decisions to improve the A20 road between Folkestone and Dover.

Mr. Chope: Construction of part of the new A20 between Folkestone and Court wood started in October. Design is continuing on the remaining part.

The compulsory purchase order for the section between Court wood and Dover was made in July. Land acquisition and rehousing of Dover district council's tenants affected by the scheme are under way.

We are on programme for completion of the whole length from Folkestone to Dover by the planned opening of the channel tunnel in mid-1993.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the fastest travelling time from *(a)* Chester, *(b)* Cardiff, *(c)* Newport, *(d)* Swansea and *(e)* Holyhead for (i) freight and (ii) passengers to the channel rail tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: British Rail's current estimate of the fastest travelling times for passenger trains from the destinations requested to the United Kingdom portal of the channel tunnel is as follows:

Origin	*Time (hours)*
Chester	4½
Cardiff	4½
Newport	4
Swansea	5½
Holyhead	5¾

These estimates may of course change between now and the opening of the tunnel in 1993.

British Rail does not have equivalent figures for freight trains, for which reliability of delivery will be more important than journey time.

A2

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress made since February in implementing the decision to dual the A2 road between Lydden and Dover.

Mr. Chope: Following the addition of the A2 Lydden (B2060)—Dover improvement scheme to the trunk road programme in February it was announced in September that preparation of the scheme would be open to consultant competition. Arrangements for this are in hand with a view to inviting competitive bids from selected consultants as soon as possible in the new year. A further announcement will be made following the appointment of the successful firm.

A1

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average volume of daily traffic using the A1 between Scotch Corner and Newcastle over the past decade; and when work to convert the A1 to a three-way carriageway will commence.

Mr. Chope: The annual average daily traffic figures show:

	1981	*1990*
Scotch Corner	16,350	28,900
Chester-le-Street	26,000	39,800
Tyne and Wear	40,800	64,400

The Tyne and Wear section of the A1(M) is currently three-lane carriageway. A study of the route from Scotch Corner to Tyneside was announced in "Roads for Prosperity". Consultants are yet to be appointed.

Traffic Calming

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local authorities which *(a)* made inquiries following publication of traffic advisory leaflet 2/90 and *(b)* are spending public money on introducing speed control humps as traffic calming measures.

Mr. Chope: (a) Since the traffic advisory unit leaflet was published on 15 November, copies have been sent to all local highway authorities. Many enquiries and requests for further copies have been received but no central record of such contracts is maintained.

(b) This information is not held centrally.

Driving Tests

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average time taken for an applicant for a driving test to remain on the waiting list in each area in Wales.

Mr. Chope: The average waiting times for L tests at Welsh driving test centres are as follows:

Centre	*Average Waiting Time (Weeks)*
Abergavenny	8
Aberystwyth[1]	2
Ammanford	3
Bala[1]	9
Bangor	2
Barry[1]	12
Brecon[1]	1
Bridgend	3
Cardiff East	3
Cardiff West	9
Cardigan[1]	4
Carmarthen[1]	2
Cwmbran	2
Haverfordwest	3
Holyhead[1]	10
Lampeter	1
Llandrindod Wells[1]	4
Llandudno[1]	2
Llanelli	5
Merthyr Tydfil	2
Milford Haven[1]	2
Mold	13
Monmouth[1]	9
Newport	7
Newtown	4
Pembroke Dock[1]	3
Pontypridd	11
Pwllheli[1]	1
Rhyl	1
Swansea	7
Treorchy[1]	9
Wrexham	8

[1] Occasional centres staffed only as and when required.

M66, Denton

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have occurred at the junction of the M67 and M66 in Denton since the M66 opened; and when work will commence to improve that junction.

Mr. Chope: Since the M66 opened on 28 April 1989, there have been 16 accidents involving personal injury, only one of which was serious, and 30 involving damage only. Work on the junction improvement is programmed to start in April 1991.

Electrification, Cheshire

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the reasons for the delay in allowing Cheshire county council to borrow £800,000 for its share of the costs of the Hooton to Ellesmere Port and Chester electrification scheme.

Mr. Freeman: The total cost of this project is about £10 million spread over three years. Even if credit approvals

could be made available this year, it would not make sense to do so unless the rest of the project could be financed. I am considering whether adequate resources could be made available for the scheme as a whole and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Wheel Clamping Firms (Licensing)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will now consider a system of licensing for wheel clamping firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) on 22 November at column 169.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether people with Alzheimer's disease are accepted as being terminally ill when assessing income support rates for people in nursing homes.

Miss Widdecombe: The level of income support payable depends on the type of care the nursing home is providing for the claimant. The adjudication officer must be satisfied that the home is recognised by the registration authority as able to provide terminal care and that the resident is receiving such care before the higher limit can apply.

Income Support Deductions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support deductions are currently being made for *(a)* poll tax arrears, *(b)* social fund loan payments, *(c)* fuel payment arrears and *(d)* any other purposes; and if he will give a breakdown of these by social security office throughout the country.

Miss Widdecombe: The number of deductions from income support for arrears of community charge by local office was given in the reply by my hon. Friend the former Under-Secretary of State on 22 October to the hon. Member for Coventry South-East (Mr. Nellist) at column *78*. The latest available information for other types of deduction is shown in the tables; for these, information by local social security office is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1
Deductions from Income Support
(Social Fund repayments, accommodation, fuel and water charges)

Purpose	*Number of deductions*[1]	*Date*
Community charge arrears	9,112	31 August 1990
Social Fund loan repayments	430,000	31 October 1990
Fuel	[2]246,691	31 August 1990
Other purposes	134,671	31 August 1990

[1] The information is not routinely published. it derives from the Department's management information system and, with the exception of social fund loan repayments, is obtained from a quarterly count of deductions in action. Data on social fund loan repayments are collected monthly.

[2] Some deductions for fuel charges cover current consumption costs alone because the arrears have been cleared. It is not possible to identify only those cases with continuing arrears.

Table 2
Recovery of overpaid benefit, Voluntary Unemployment deductions

Purpose	*Number of deductions*
Recovery of overpaid benefit	79,485
Voluntary unemployment deductions	31,574

Note: The information derives from table 10 of the Annual Statistical Enquiry in May 1989, a copy of which is in the Library.

19-year-olds (Non-advanced Education)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what financial assistance his Department provides for 19-year-olds in full-time non-advanced education; and if he will make a statement ;

(2) what compensatory financial assistance his Department provides to families where parents are in receipt of income support and whose child is aged 19 years or older and in full-time non-advanced education;

(3) what financial assistance his Department provides to young people aged 19 years or older who are living independently and are in full-time non-advanced education.

Miss Widdecombe: These young people should apply to the local education authorities or the further education institution at which they study for financial assistance. They or their families claiming for them are not entitled to income support but for certain exceptions, including lone parent and disabled students.

DEFENCE

HMS Warspite

12. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications of the decommissioning of HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The decision to decommission HMS Warspite followed the announcement on 25 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in which he envisaged, in addition to Trident, a future submarine force of around 16 boats, some three quarters of which would be nuclear-powered. This reduction in submarine force levels is to be achieved by decommissioning older, less capable boats, such as HMS Warspite, while retaining the more modern ones in service.

Military Air Crashes

13. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he proposes to take to speed up publication of reports from boards of inquiry into fatal military air crashes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The summaries of such reports are not published until all relevant investigations, including any coroners' inquests or fatal accident inquiries, are complete. Once these conditions are met, we aim for the earliest possible publication.

NATO

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what involvement his Department has had with NATO undercover operations which countenance terrorism.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on operational matters of this nature. But I can assure the hon. Member that neither Her Majesty's Government nor NATO would countenance any operations involving terrorism in any way.

19. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role is envisaged for NATO in conciliation arrangements in respect of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Tom King: The Paris CSCE summit recommended the establishment of mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts between CSCE participants, including possible conciliation arrangements. These matters will be further discussed shortly but I think it unlikely that NATO as such would have a role in them.

Nuclear Submarines

17. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans have been made for the disposal of the Vanguard class nuclear-powered submarine fleet, subsequent to its decommissioning.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Vanguard class submarines are expected to remain in service until well into the next century.

SA80 Rifle

18. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems are being experienced with the use of the SA80 rifle.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: When SA80 entered service experience showed that modifications to certain components would improve the strength and reliability of the weapon whilst retaining the greater accuracy and other advantages of the SA80 over its predecessors. These have been incorporated into a modification programme which is being implemented.

Naval Procurement

20. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current naval procurement programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We currently have nine type 23 frigates on order and expect to invite tenders for the next batch within the next few months. Tenders for additional single role minehunters are being assessed; two auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels are under construction. The Government remain committed to a four-boat Trident force and we have just placed an order for the third Vanguard class submarine. The first Upholder class conventional submarine is undergoing final acceptance trials now and will be accepted into service very shortly. The Sea Harrier capability update and EH101 (Merlin) helicopter programmes are proceeding.

Sea Systems Controllerate

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed centralising of the sea systems controllerate with particular regard to the costing and timetable of such a move.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It remains our intention to collocate the sea systems controllerate as soon as practicable, and with a proper consideration of all the costs.

Sea King Helicopters

22. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place the order for additional search and rescue Sea King helicopters to replace the Wessex helicopters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: No decision has yet been taken on a replacement for the Wessex, which continues to make a valuable contribution to the SAR service. As part of our normal equipment planning process, we are considering the case for its replacement. I cannot, at this stage, say whether we shall need new helicopters.

The Gulf

23. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the additional costs to his departmental budget caused by the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Tom King: Revised Winter Supplementary Estimates being submitted to the House for approval include £480 million for additional costs so far identified arising from the Gulf crisis.

24. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current situation of British forces in the Gulf.

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of the British troops in the Gulf.

Mr. Tom King: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what boots are being worn by British forces serving under desert conditions in the Gulf;

(2) whether desert boots have been issued to British forces serving under desert conditions in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Normal issue combat boots are being worn by British forces in the Gulf for duty purposes, while lightweight boots have been issued for off duty wear. In addition, limited quantities of a new desert combat boot have been trialled, and are currently in production. They will be issued as supplies become available.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether British forces serving under desert conditions in the Gulf are required to purchase desert boots for their own use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of fatalities involving British forces serving in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Two.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, giving such information as is available, those accidents that have occurred so far to British service personnel in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The pilot of a Jaguar aircraft was killed when his aircraft crashed on 13 November. On 30 November a Royal Army Medical Corps corporal serving with 33 field hospital was killed in a shooting incident. There have been a number of other accidents, including one other involving the loss of an aircraft, in which service personnel have been injured, but it would not be practicable to provide a detailed list.

Territorial Army

25. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current manpower strength of the Territorial Army and Voluntary Reserve.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 30 September 1990 the strength of the Territorial Army, including the home service force, was 74,720.

Armed Services (Insurance)

26. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to ensure that members of the armed services are not disadvantaged when seeking life insurance cover or cover in relation to house purchase as a result of an international situation involving British military interests.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 23 November 1990 at column *234*.

Trident

27. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects Trident to be operational.

Mr. Alan Clark: As previously announced, it remains our intention to deploy Trident into operational service in the mid-1990s.

"Options for Change"

28. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce the impacts upon local economies following reductions in forces following "Options for Change".

Mr. Alan Clark: Local economic and environmental factors will be taken fully into account.

Nuclear Tests

29. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now review his policy on compensation to service personnel who are suffering health problems as a result of their involvement in British nuclear tests.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 November, *Official Report*, column 79, he will set out the number of military and scientific staff sent to the United States of America to supervise and monitor the test; and if he will indicate to which Government data on the test will be made available, and under what conditions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to give details of United Kingdom personnel who attend such tests. Data from the test is made available to the United States under the terms of the 1958 United States-United Kingdom agreement for mutual co-operation for defence purposes.

RAF Exercises

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the titles, functions of and aircraft types involved in the RAF-sponsored exercises *(a)* on Salisbury plain between 15 and 19 May, *(b)* in mid-Wales between 13 and 19 July and *(c)* in East Lothian between 17 and 21 July.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Exercise STONE WARRIOR
A combined Royal Air Force and 5 Airborne Brigade tactical exercise, on the occasion of the royal review of 5th Airborne Brigade, involving Hercules aircraft.

(b) Exercise OSEX 90
An offensive air support exercise, involving Harrier, Jaguar, A-10, Tornado and air defence aircraft.

(c) Exercise RED LANYARD 2/90
There is no record of a major Royal Air Force exercise in East Lothian between 17 and 21 July. However, Exercise Red Lanyard 2/90 was then in progress, affecting, among other areas, south west Scotland and the Borders, Red Lanyard 2/90 rehearsed 1st Battalion the Parachute Regiment in its role as the lead parachute battalion of 5th Airborne Brigade and involved Hercules aircraft.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of aircraft whose noise levels were measured during the noise survey at RAF West Freugh in June 1990; and if he will list the range of flying speeds and heights for which noise level data were collected, for each type of aircraft.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) gave to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 10 July 1990 at column *191*, which listed those aircraft involved in the survey which are common users of the United Kingdom low-flying system. Additionally, measurements were taken of noise levels from F15 and F16 aircraft which are not common users of the United Kingdom low-flying system. Further details of the survey will be published when results are available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to extend the noise insulation grant scheme around military airfields to *(a)* schools, *(b)* hospitals and *(c)* old people's homes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence's noise insulation grant scheme is designed to provide a measure of relief from the worst effects of military aircraft noise for residents when in their homes. A "home" may be a

residential home for the elderly or permanent living accommodation in a school or hospital. Apart from that circumstance, accommodation in schools and hospitals is not included within the scope of the scheme. However, as previously announced by my hon. Friend the then Minister for Roads and Traffic on 28 June 1989 at column 475, the possible extension of the statutory schemes (which the Ministry of Defence follows administratively) to include such accommodation is being studied by an inter-departmental group led by the Department of Transport. I understand that the group expect to submit their report in the first quarter of 1991.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what ear protection was provided to *(a)* Ministry of Defence personnel and *(b)* civilian contractor personnel operating noise measurement and tracking equipment on the ground during the military aircraft noise survey at West Freugh in June.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Appropriate hearing protection was made available to personnel involved in this survey.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the maximum values of single noise events measured during the military aircraft noise survey at West Freugh in June will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No decision has yet been taken on the format in which the results of this study will be published.

Exercise Border Fox

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopter low-level sorties were carried out during Exercise Border Fox in September; and how many of these took place on 16 September.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A total of 325 hours were flown by helicopters during Exercise Border Fox in September. It is not possible to give a breakdown of the proportion spent at low level; 16 September fell outside the exercise period and involved minimal flying.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of Exercise Border Fox.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The purpose of Exercise Border Fox was to practice the conduct of airmobile operations and forward observation.

Low Flying

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if pilots are permitted to exceed the normal maximum cruising speed in the United Kingdom low-flying system in order to regain their planned timing on low-flying sorties.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes, although this should seldom be necessary since sorties are generally planned at speeds below the normal maximum cruising speed.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what minimum height the Belgian Air Force aircraft which paid an exchange visit to RAF Wattisham during October were permitted to fly over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Two hundred and fifty feet.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the low-flying exercise centred on the Spadeadam range, scheduled to take place on 1 November; what types of aircraft and which units were involved; and how many sorties took place.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The exercise centred on the Spadeadam range on 1 November was designed to enable United States Air Force aircraft based in the United Kingdom and continental Europe to undertake electronic warfare training together. Such exercises regularly take place at various bases in Europe.

The types of aircraft involved and their units were: A10s from 10th and 81st Tactical Fighter Wings (TFW); F-111s from 48th TFW; F-4Gs and F-16s from 52nd TFW; F-15s from 36th TFW; EF-111s from 42nd ECS (Electronic Combat Squadron); and EC-130s from 43rd ECS; 38 sorties were flown.

No general use of the United Kingdom low-flying system was authorised for non-UK based aircraft.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any instances since 1979 in which a request from an hon. Member for low flying avoidance status to be applied to a location in his or her constituency has been granted.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if pilots are permitted to book into low-flying areas in which the actual or forecast cloudbase or visibility do not meet the minima laid down for visual low flying.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes. Authorising officers and air crew are, however, responsible for ensuring that any proposed sortie can be safely carried out in the light of the prevailing weather conditions and in accordance with low-flying regulations.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what cuts in Royal Air Force fast jet flying hours have been applied as a result of the defence spending economies announced on 31 July.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been no cuts in flying hours as a result of these measures.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the purpose of the fast jet low-flying activity scheduled to take place on 2 September in northern England; what types of aircraft and which units were involved; how many sorties took place on each day; and if the Spadeadam range was specially activated for this activity;

(2) what was the purpose of the fast jet low-flying activity scheduled took take place on bank holiday Monday, 27 August, in northern England and Scotland; what types of aircraft and which units were involved; how many sorties took place on each day; and if the Spadeadam range was specially activated for this activity.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Low-flying training in northern England and Scotland was exceptionally authorised on bank holiday Monday 27 August and on Sunday 2 September for air crew undertaking training connected with our current commitment in the Gulf. In the event, no such flying took place on either date.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what way the southern boundary of low flying area 13 has been altered since July; and what was the purpose of the alteration.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The southern boundary of LFA 13 has been adjusted northwards to remove an area not required for the operation of the RAF Spadeadam range.

Skyguard Radar

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any Skyguard radars were involved in the mobile threat emitter equipment deployments listed in his reply to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *626*.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes, in the deployment to East Lothian between 17 and 21 July 1990.

Aircraft Exercises

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if aircraft are permitted to release chaff outside Ministry of Defence-owned land in the vicinity of Spadeadam range.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes, in strictly limited quantities and subject to other restrictions imposed in range orders.

Wiley Sike Weapons Range

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year the dropping of practice bombs on the Wiley Sike air weapons range was first authorised; and what use of the facility has been made by Royal Air Force aircraft in each year since its establishment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The dropping of practice bombs on the Wiley Sike air weapons range was first authorised in 1983. Since then the range has been used by the RAF for this purpose as follows:

	Days
1983	4
1984	9
1985	4
1986	6
1987	4
1988	6
1989	15

Fuel Jettisoning Areas

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of the authorised fuel jettisoning areas for military aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no such specifically authorised areas.

RAF Aircraft (Accidents)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all incidents since August 1989 in which Royal Air Force aircraft have struck objects on the ground during flight but have subsequently landed successfully, giving the date, aircraft type, location and circumstances of each case.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested is in the table. Occurrences involving helicopters landing or hovering in the field are omitted.

Date	*Aircraft type*	*Location*	*Circumstances*
22 September 1989	Tornado GR1	Near Goose Bay, Canada	Tree strike during operational low-flying training sortie
7 December 1989	Puma	Belize	Hit a single wire at 60 feet while climbing from a forward airstrip
30 January 1990	Puma	Bomoen, Norway	Hit a logging wire while climbing from a field site with an underslung load
16 August 1990	Wessex	Northern Ireland	Hit a wire with the tail wheel while climbing from a field landing site
12 October 1990	Jaguar GR1a	RAF Coltishall	Hit approach lights on landing
23 October 1990	Tornado GR1	Northern Scotland	Wire-strike on operational low-flying training sortie
26 November 1990	Tornado GR1	Southern Scotland	Wire-strike on operational low-flying training sortie

Shackleton Aircraft

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the occasions since 1985 on which Shackleton aircraft have been *(a)* placed on standby for search and rescue operations and *(b)* used during search and rescue operations;

(2) what secondary roles are performed by RAF Shackleton aircraft apart from flare-dropping for search and rescue operations.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We do not have records of the number of times Shackleton aircraft have been placed on standby for search and rescue (SAR) operations since 1985. The table lists the occasions since 1985 when Shackleton aircraft have been used for SAR operations:

Date	*Mission*
15 May 1986	A Shackleton aircraft provided top cover for a SAR helicopter after an aircraft ditched in the sea.
15 July 1986	A Shackleton aircraft located an officer who had ejected from an RAF Lightning seven nautical miles north of Whitby and helped direct a SAR helicopter to him.
8 October 1986	A Shackleton aircraft assisted in the search for a missing aircraft.
22-24 April 1987	Shackleton aircraft flew four missions as on-scene commander during the search for the wreckage and casualties from an RAF Buccaneer which had crashed 30 nautical miles east of Wick.
2 and 8 July 1987	On each occasion a Shackleton aircraft provided top cover for a SAR helicopter attending an incident at sea.

Date	Mission
3 October 1988	A Shackleton aircraft provided top cover for a SAR helicopter attending a medical rescue from a boat.
28 October 1988	A Shackleton aircraft assisted in the search for a body at sea.
8 November 1988	A Shackleton aircraft was used to search for the source of a distress signal beacon.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement outlining the present and future financing arrangements for Britain's share of the European fighter aircraft costs.

Mr. Alan Clark: Within the financial limit set out in the intergovernmental EFA development memorandum of understanding, funds are available for the United Kingdom's share of work undertaken in the full development phase of EFA. Financial arrangements for subsequent phases will depend on the form of arrangements put in place to cover the production of EFA.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of commitment to the development and purchase of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 29 October 1990 at column *413*.

Arms Control Verification

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to increase the expertise available to his Department on verification of arms control agreements following the completion of the treaty of Paris on conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 6 March to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) at column *620*. The joint arms control implementation group (JACIG) will become operational on 1 January 1991.

Safety Inspections

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of occasions on which the principal specialist inspector from the Health and Safety Executive has visited atomic weapons establishment sites in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Full details of the number of occasions the principal specialist inspector from the Health and Safety Executive has visited Atomic Weapons Establishment sites over the last 10 years are not available but over the last four years the following visits have been made.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

	Aldermaston	*Burghfield*	*Foulness*	*Total*
1987	14	6	2	22
1988	16	1	1	18
1989	27	3	1	31
1990	18	3	1	22

This is typical of previous years.

The principal specialist inspector from the Health and Safety executive does not visit Atomic Weapons Establishment Cardiff. However, the factory inspector does, and has visited on three occasions during 1989 and 1990.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the principal specialist inspector visits atomic weapons establishment sites without informing atomic weapons establishment management prior to his visit; and what is his security clearance.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Health and Safety Executive principal inspector informs the Atomic Weapons Establishment prior to his visits. He holds high security clearance which gives him access to all parts of the establishment.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish the agreement that exists between his Department and the Health and Safety Executive regarding visits by the principal specialist inspector.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. The written agreement which exists is a classified document and is not for general publication.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current staffing level of the safety division of the atomic weapons establishment; what are the civil service grades of the members of the division; and what powers they possess to alter operations within the atomic weapons establishment on the grounds of safety.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: AWE safety division is staffed by industrial, scientific, technical, supervisory and administrative grades. The division, which is headed by director safety, provides safety services and advice to operating divisions and, if necessary, by direct recourse to the chief executive. It is not our policy to reveal the exact numbers on deployment of staff at AWE.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 December 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Judges

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what target he maintains for the number and percentage of female judges there will be in the year 2000;

(2) what target he maintains for the number and percentage of black judges there will be in the year 2000;

(3) what steps he is taking to increase the number of female judges;

(4) what steps he is taking to increase the number of black judges.

The Attorney-General: Candidates for judicial appointment are considered on their merits, regardless of sex or ethnic origin. The Lord Chancellor has, however, repeatedly made clear his wish to appoint more women and members of ethnic minorities to judicial office. Steps have been taken to make this widely known, and thus to encourage more suitably qualified women and members of ethnic minorities to put themselves forward for consideration. The composition of the bench at any one time is, however, dependent on the composition of the legal profession in the age groups with the necessary experience to be suitable. At the moment, there are relatively few women and ethnic minority candidates in the legal profession in the appropriate age groups with the right experience. It is expected that the number will increase significantly over the next 10 years, and that this will result in more women judges, and judges from ethnic minorities. It is, however, impossible to predict the composition of the pool of suitably qualified candidates for judicial office, or the number of appointments needed, 10 years ahead, and it would therefore be inappropriate to set targets.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage and number of *(a)* county court judges, *(b)* judges who sit full time in the Crown courts, *(c)* judges who sit in the divisional court, *(d)* recorders, *(e)* Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, *(f)* judges who sit in the Court of Appeal and Court of Criminal Appeal and *(g)* judges who sit in the High Court, are female.

The Attorney-General: The following figures are correct as at 1 December 1990. There are 10 Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, of whom none is female. There are 27 Lords Justices of Appeal, of whom one is female (3·7 per cent.). There are 83 High Court judges, of whom two are female (2·4 per cent.). There are 424 circuit judges, of whom 19 are female (4·5 per cent.). There are 762 recorders, of whom 43 are female (5·6 per cent.). In addition, the Lord Chief Justice, Master of the Rolls, president of the family division and Vice-Chancellor are all male.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Attorney-General what percentage and number of *(a)* county court judges, *(b)* judges who sit full time in the Crown courts, *(c)* judges who sit in the Court of Appeal and Court of Criminal Appeal, *(d)* judges who sit in the divisional court, *(e)* judges who sit in the High Court, *(f)* Lords of Appeal in Ordinary and *(g)* recorders, are black.

The Attorney-General: Records are not kept on the ethnic origin of members of the judiciary or of candidates for judicial appointments, but our understanding of the position is as follows.

There are no Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, heads of division, Lords Justices of Appeal, or High Court judges from the ethnic minorities. There are 424 circuit judges, of whom one is from an ethnic minority (0·2 per cent.). There are 762 recorders, of whom five are from ethnic minorities (0·65 per cent.).

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Associations

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to make any orders under section 48(2) of the Housing Act 1988 to amend the permissible objects of housing associations.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

North Sea

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to implement the declarations made following conferences on the protection of the North sea in Bremen 1984, London 1987 and the Hague 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Progress on implementation of measures agreed at Bremen was reported to the second North sea conference held in London in 1987 and detailed national progress reports on the implementation of second North sea conference measures were prepared by all North sea states for the Hague conference in March 1990. Copies of these reports are held in the Library.

In July this year the United Kingdom published a "Guidance Note on the Ministerial Declaration of the Third International Conference on the Protection of the North Sea" which details action planned to implement the new measures agreed at the Hague. Copies are available in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* based upon the information contained in annex VIII of his local government finance statement of 31 October, showing for each local authority area listed on pages 2 to 13 *(a)* income from the community charge for standard spending, *(b)* business rate income and *(c)* revenue support grant, in each case as a percentage of their standard spending assessment, with each local authority being listed in ascending order according to the percentage size of their revenue support grant.

Mr. Key: Revenue support grant (RSG) and business rate income are distributed to charging authorities so that if each notifiable authority spent at the level appropriate to provide a standard level of service, all charging authorities could set a charge at the community charge for standard

spending of £380·41. As the cost of providing a standard level of service, measured by the standard spending assessment (SSA) varies with the demographic, social and physical characteristics of an area—the proportions of SSA met from RSG and business rates also varies. Uniquely the SSA for the City of London does not reflect the cost of providing a standard level of service.

Full details of the distribution of RSG and business rates for 1991-92 are set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) approved on 18 January and the draft Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (England) published on 31 October.

I have today placed in the Library a table showing for each receiving authority area in England the information requested, together with an additional column containing the percentage of standard spending assessment (SSA) met by total external support, that is, the sum of business rate income, revenue support grant, area protection grant and the inner London education grant. The SSA for a receiving authority area is calculated by summing the SSAs per adult of the receiving authority and of all notifiable authorities precepting on that receiving authority and multiplying by its relevant population.

Roofing Slates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for the level of production of roofing slates within the United Kingdom; what was the level five years ago; and what were the corresponding figures for the importing of roofing slates into the United Kingdom in each of those two periods.

Mr. Key: The information requested on the production and imports of roofing slates for the United Kingdom is given in the table. Exports have been added for completeness.

Tonnes

	Production	*Imports*	*Exports*
1984	22,000	14,000	2,000
1989	46,500	49,000	5,500

Leaseholders

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many leaseholders live in flats, including old houses converted to flats, in England and Wales excluding right-to-buy purchases from local authorities.

Sir George Young: The information is not available in the form requested. In 1981 the total number of leasehold households in England and Wales was 1,506,434. It is likely that the majority of these households occupied flats.

Single People (Accommodation)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many single persons, over the age of 16 years, are currently living within family units; how these persons are considered in producing projections for future housing needs; and what assessment he has made of the future requirement for single persons' accommodation.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 22 November 1990]:* The estimated number of single persons aged 16 or over living within family units in England in 1988 is 4·9 million, of which 1·3 million were aged 16 or 17. These figures are derived from the 1988 labour force survey housing trailer.

In estimating the future number of households my Department makes projections of the proportions of persons who will be household heads, separately by age, sex and marital status (including single). The method is described in the Department's publication "1985 based estimate of numbers of households", a copy of which is in the Library.

The Government do not make estimates of housing requirements for particular types of household.

Business in the Community

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many schemes in cities and towns have been set up or commenced under the Government's business in the community programme; if he will list the schemes giving locations and the amount of grant allocated for each scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* Business in the Community (BITC) is not a Government initiative. It is a charity funded by over 400 of the country's major businesses and grants from the Departments of the Environment (DOE), Employment (DE) and Trade and Industry (DTI). BITC encourages business men to play a part in encouraging economic regeneration aims across the country. I will write to the hon. Member with details of my Department's grants.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Firms (Uniforms)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations he proposes to introduce to limit private firms' use of uniforms in the style of police officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans, at present, to introduce such regulations. I am pleased to note that the British Standards Institution has recently issued, for public comment, a draft British standard code of practice for manned security services, which makes recommendations on the provision of uniforms by security companies.

Hazardous Chemicals (Transportation)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met local authority representatives to discuss the role of local authorities in the energency response to an accident involving the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals; if he will detail that role; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has not had the opportunity to meet with local authority representatives to discuss this specific matter. However, Mr. Brook, the Home Office civil emergencies adviser, has had, and will continue to have, discussions with the local authorities about their response to a whole range of civil emergencies.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist to protect the general public from possible off-site consequences of an accident involving the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals.

Mr. John Patten: The off-site consequences arising from such an accident are dealt with by the emergency services in consultation with the local authority and sources of specialist advice on chemical toxicity.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he has taken in respect of research into alcohol misuse and the social effects of alcohol misuse in England; and how much money he has made available for this purpose in the current financial year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the past three years the Home Office has commissioned a survey of drinking in England and Wales, carried out research into drinking and disorder in non-metropolitan areas, evaluated the effects of experimental byelaws to control public drinking in the central parts of various towns and cities and commissioned a preliminary study of the role economic models may play in understanding the links between alcohol and crime. The cost of work falling in this financial year was about £15,000.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is not available centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Details of remuneration at 1989 rates for appointees to Home Office public bodies are contained in the publication "Public Bodies", a copy of which is in the Library.

Police Inspectorate

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish reports by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on its inspections of police forces.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[pursuant to my noble Friend's reply, 23 March 1990, c. 794]:* All reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary inspections are now published; the Derbyshire report will be published tomorrow and copies will then be placed in the Library.

The report conveys the professional policing judgment of the inspectorate; it offers a worrying catalogue of Derbyshire county council's policies and procedures which, in the view of the inspectorate, hinder the commendable efforts of the police force to provide the best standards of policing.

No bids for extra police manpower were made for 1988 and 1989: my predecessor approved an additional 19 posts for 1990—on which 51 per cent. police grant would have been paid—but the council was unwilling to meet its share of the funding and the posts were not taken up; civilian posts are left vacant or take six months to fill; buildings are in a poor state and the police committee did not respond to a 1988 Home Office invitation to submit proposals for a building plan; budgetary processes are exceptionally cumbersome, and little control is devolved to the chief constable.

Resources for policing are allocated on the same basis throughout England and Wales. But no other police authority has merited such informed professional criticism. The issues identified in the report are the consequences of the policies of the Derbyshire authorities; I shall be watching very closely to see what action they take to make substantial improvements in their performance.

TRANSPORT

Train Passengers (Falls)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider establishing an independent inquiry to look into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of passengers falling from trains.

Mr. McLoughlin: Accidents involving deaths are fully investigated by railway operators and the appropriate coroner. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate would investigate as a matter of course if there were any evidence that accepted standards of safety had not been maintained.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of passengers falling from moving trains there were in each of the last five years; how many died from the fall; and how many were seriously injured.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

Year	*Fatal*	*Major Injury*	*Minor Injury*	*Total*
1985	16	8	42	66
1986	12	15	34	61
1987	26	16	28	70
1988	19	13	32	64
1989	19	16	12	47

Empty Houses

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many houses his Department owns; how many are empty; and how many are along routes of proposed road building schemes.

Mr. Chope: On 1 October 1990, the total number of dwellings owned by the Department of Transport was 2,370. Of these 2,339 have been acquired in connection with road schemes and 31 are used by the coastguard services. A total of 498 are empty.

Aviation Fuel (Transport)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of *(a)* the amount, *(b)* the type and *(c)* the frequency of the transportation of loads of aviation fuel from the Isle of Grain through London to Stansted airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: This is a commercial and operational matter for British Rail.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. McLoughlin: Gross running costs expenditure on Department of Transport administration was 9·3 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in 1988-89. During the same period the retail prices index rose by 7·8 per cent.

Hazardous Chemicals (Transportation)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements have been agreed concerning rail transportation of hazardous chemicals through the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No arrangements have yet been agreed. It is for Eurotunnel to put forward proposals for the movement of dangerous goods. The proposals will be considered by the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission which is advised on safety matters by the independent binational safety authority.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will set out the regulatory framework that exists to cover the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals;

(2) what regulatory framework exists to cover the possible health and safety implications of the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will review the regulations and their enforcement controlling the containment of chemicals in transit in the light of the Isle of Grain derailment on 28 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Dangerous substances are carried by rail in accordance with the British Railways Board's "List of Dangerous Goods and Conditions of Acceptance by Rail on Freight Services and Parcels Service" (BR 22426). These are based on the United Nations' "Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods".

Responsibility for the safety of staff and the public rests primarily with the railway operator. Her Majesty's railway inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 on the railways. The inspectorate transferred to the Health and Safety Executive on 1 December.

I am considering what further action is needed to ensure that dangerous substances safety rules on our railways and those applying internationally are regularly updated and appropriately aligned.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken concerning *(a)* the derailment of a train carrying chemicals at Stratford, east London, on 21 November, identifying the chemicals being transported and *(b)* the derailment of a train near the Isle of Grain refinery on 28 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: An inspecting officer of the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate (RI) visited the scene of the accident on the Isle of Grain on the morning of 28 November. British Rail will be conducting its own inquiries into both the Stratford and Isle of Grain accidents and will send a copy of its findings in due course to RI, which will then decide whether any further action is necessary. I understand from BR that the train at Stratford included wagons carrying sodium hydroxide solids and diphenyl methane—4, 4—diifocyanate, but that these particular wagons were not derailed.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the inventory his Department maintains on those chemicals currently transported by rail in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department does not have such an inventory, but I understand that British Rail has a list of dangerous substances which can be transported by rail.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of railway accidents involving chemicals being transported in each of the years 1980 to 1990 and for each of the categories *(a)* corrosive, *(b)* poisonous, *(c)* volatile and *(d)* explosive.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the railway inspectorate does not have information in the form requested.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what role his Department takes in planning for, and responding to, possible accidents involving the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for British Rail, the emergency services and local authorities.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what hazard assessment and emergency planning arrangements exist for accidents involving the rail transportation of hazardous chemicals; what body is responsible for this work; and if possible off-site consequences of an accident are taken into account in the assessment and planning arrangements.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail, the emergency services and local authorities, which are responsible for the off-site consequences of an accident, liaise closely in assessing hazards and developing arrangements to deal with major railway accidents, including those involving hazardous chemicals. As part of these arrangements, joint exercises are held frequently.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedure exists to provide emergency services attending an accident involving the rail transportation of chemicals with information concerning the identity and possible hazard of these substances; and how early during an emergency response such information is available to the emergency services.

Mr. Freeman: Every railway wagon carrying a dangerous substance should be identified by a HAZCHEM label, and there are also arrangements for British Rail regional control offices to provide the emergency services with lists of wagons and contents. Further advice is available from the consignor or the Chemical Industries Association's CHEMSAFE arrangements. I understand that response times are usually very quick.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: Fees and salaries for the majority of appointments made by my right hon. and Friend are contained in the annual publication "Public Bodies" published by HMSO, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The appointments which are not listed in this document are:

Acting conservator of the River Mersey (£7,667 per annum),

Delegate to the Central Rhine Commission (unpaid),

Chairman and members of the honorary medical advisory panel on driving and diabetes (unpaid),

Chairman and members of the honorary medical advisory panel for driving and disorders of the nervous system (unpaid),

Chairman and members of the honorary medical advisory panel on driving and cardiovascular disorders (unpaid).

My right hon. and learned Friend also appoints some part-time members to ports authorities, but their remuneration is a matter for the individual authority concerned.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the passenger trains for services through the channel tunnel from destinations from north of London to be delivered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail last December announced plans to operate daytime international rail services connecting stations on the east and west coast main lines directly with Paris and Brussels. These plans remain unchanged. However the high-speed trains are even more complex than those which will operate between London, Paris and Brussels and will require a substantial period of safety and operational testing. The manufacturers have not yet been able to quote a firm price and delivery date. As a result, through passenger services are unlikely to be available until 1994. In the light of this I have indicated to British Rail the importance I attach to improving the journeys of passengers from north of London in the period immediately after the tunnel opens. I understand it is now planning to operate some inter-city services from the north into Waterloo, so avoiding the need for passengers to cross London. Tenders for rolling stock for night trains through the tunnel are likely to be invited shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about ministerial responsibilities in his Department.

Mr. Brooke: I announced yesterday the following ministerial responsibilities.

The right hon. the Lord Belstead, Her Majesty's Paymaster General and deputy to the Secretary of State, is responsible for law and order and the Department of Education. He is spokesman on all Northern Ireland matters in the House of Lords.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney MP, Minister of State, is responsible for the Department of Finance and Personnel, the central community relations unit, political affairs division and the information services. He is also the spokesman in the House of Commons on law and order and education matters.

Mr. Richard Needham MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, is responsible for the Department of Economic Development, the Industrial Development Board, and the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, is responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Agriculture. As one of the four United Kingdom Ministers responsible for agriculture I will maintain my interest in that area.

I will continue to have overall responsibility for the work of the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Soviet Union

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is currently being provided to the Soviet Union; what form it takes; and if there are any plans for it to be stepped up.

Mrs. Chalker: We have announced a know-how fund of £20 million for the Soviet Union. Its aim will be to transfer British skills and expertise in areas essential to economic reform, particularly food distribution, energy, small business formation and financial services. Wider financial assistance will be a matter for multilateral action in the light of the EC and IMF studies of the Soviet economy now under way.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Barriers

14. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress by the European Community on removing barriers to trade to permit a satisfactory outcome to the Uruguay round.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is this week leading the United Kingdom delegation to the ministerial meeting in Brussels called to conclude the Uruguay round of trade negotiations. It is in everyone's interest, including the European Community, that the

round should succeed. For this to happen, all concerned will need to show flexibility. But it is essential to preserve and strengthen the multilateral trading system. We are continuing to work with our Community partners in Brussels this week to bring this about.

British Exporters

15. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department intends to bring forward any new proposals to help British exporters.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department is seeking, through the current GATT negotiations, to liberalise the world trading environment. We are also leading the way in implementing the directives necessary for creating the single European market.

34. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to help British exporters.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides a wide range of services for British exporters. We are continually monitoring our schemes to ensure they are meeting the needs of business.

Textiles and Clothing

17. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of trade in textiles and clothing.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend is seeking to improve market access by reducing tariff and trade barriers and to strengthen the rules and disciplines of GATT so as to provide fairer conditions for trade in textiles and clothing.

Defence Industry

18. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had from industry about the future of the United Kingdom defence industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is in contact with many defence companies about a wide range of matters concerning the defence industry.

Telecommunications

19. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the telecommunications duopoly.

Mr. Redwood: The Government published a consultative document entitled "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s" on 13 November. By that time, my Department had received over 40 informal submissions regarding the telecommunications duopoly. I have now received a handful of responses to the proposals in the document. The deadline for comments is 14 January 1991.

25. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the Director General of Oftel regarding developments in value added telephone services.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently discussed the full range of telephone services with the Director General of Oftel in the context of the telecommunications duopoly review.

Steel Imports

20. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current level of steel imports.

Mr. Sainsbury: The latest available figures indicate that imports of steel for the 10 months to the end of October stand at 3·6 million tonnes. This represents a fall of 5·5 per cent. compared with the same period last year.

Post Office (Letters)

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the Post Office letter monopoly.

Mr. Leigh: The Post Office's letter monopoly is a privilege, not a right. While we keep the options on the letter monopoly under review, we have no present plans to end it, although in the event of a cessation or serious disruption to the letter service we would consider suspending it. The Government and the Post Office remain fully committed to the existence of a national letter service available to everyone, including those in rural areas, at a reasonable and uniform tariff.

Companies and Financial Services Acts

23. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had about the prosecution of offences under the Companies and Financial Services Acts with the regulatory authorities.

Mr. Redwood: My officials are in regular touch with the regulatory authorities; the subjects discussed include the prosecution of offences.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

24. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to expand the role of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Through the ECGD, United Kingdom exporters have access to a range and quality of credit insurance and export finance facilities which are among the best available in the major exporting countries. My aim will be to ensure that ECGD continues to respond flexibly to its customers' changing needs.

Iraq (Trade Mission)

26. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the dates and details of the last trade mission to Iraq that was sponsored by his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: The last outward mission to Iraq sponsored by my Department took place from 22-28 June 1990. It was organised by the Nottingham chamber of commerce and 13 United Kingdom firms were represented.

The City

27. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received any representations from the City of London corporation regarding the future development of the City.

Mr. Redwood: I have received no such representations from the City of London corporation, although I am aware of its decision to mount a study. I myself hold seminars with City practitioners to discuss the future of the financial sector.

Debt Advice

28. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consider increasing the funding of debt advice services as a resource for households in debt.

Mr. Leigh: My Department does not specifically fund debt advice services, and I have no plans to do so. However, a large proportion of debt advice is provided by local citizens advice bureaux, as part of their general advisory work. Local bureaux receive most of their funding from local authorities, but my Department funds the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and Citizens Advice Scotland, which provide support services for local bureaux. Total DTI grant in aid to NACAB and CAS will be more than £11 million in 1990-91.

Project Assistance

29. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department proposes to make any changes in its scheme for assistance for exceptional projects.

Mr. Leigh: I have no plans to alter the criteria for supporting applications for assistance towards exceptional projects.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

30. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had concerning progress at the GATT talks.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend and I have had numerous representations on the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations, from a wide variety of sources, including industry, farmers, consumers and representatives of other Governments. This House also had a full debate on the Uruguay round on 23 November.

Textile Manufacturers

31. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in the GATT talks to gain access to new overseas markets by the United Kingdom textile manufacturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The GATT negotiations are continuing in Brussels this week. It is a high priority for the Government to reduce barriers to Community textiles exports in overseas markets. Some countries, such as Canada, South Africa and Thailand, have offered to reduce their textiles tariffs. The Community is pressing all participants to improve their offers on textiles as part of the overall market access negotiations.

Solvent-based Products

32. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to strengthen the provisions of the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act to restrict the sale of solvent-based products to minors.

Mr. Leigh: I have no plans to amend the provisions of the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act.

Single European Market

33. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of those measures laid down for the creation of the single European market still have to be agreed between the member states of the Community.

Mr. Sainsbury: Of the 282 measures specified for the creation of the single European market in the Commission's 1985 White Paper, 190 have been agreed and 92 still remain to be agreed.

Postal Services

35. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to meet the chairman of the Post Office to discuss the quality of postal services.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the chairman of the Post Office, Sir Bryan Nicholson, regularly to discuss various matters of mutual interest and concern.

Scottish TUC

36. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the state of Scotland's industries.

Mr. Leigh: I have no plans to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

Consumer Affairs

37. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of local authority trading standards officers to discuss consumer matters.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend has not had any meetings with representatives of local authority trading standards officers. However, officials have frequent meetings with them and I have accepted an invitation to meet representatives of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration early next year.

Glass Industry

38. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to next meet his EC Trade Minister colleagues to discuss the glass industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend keeps in close contact with his EC ministerial colleagues but he has no plans at present to discuss the glass industry.

Retail Goods

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures his Department is taking to improve the safety of retail goods.

Mr. Leigh: The safety of retail goods will continue to be a high priority for my Department. The Consumer Protection Act 1987 makes it a criminal offence to supply any consumer product that is not reasonably safe. This is supported by specific regulations, where necessary, and by a range of enforcement powers that enable action to be taken effectively and swiftly against unsafe consumer goods. I see no justification for further legislation in this area.

Company Records

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in which department requests which arise at Companies house satellite offices for individual company records on microfiche are dealt with.

Mr. Redwood: The majority of search requests made in the satellite offices are satisfied by Companies house in London.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry where microfiche records paid for at a Companies house satellite office to be sent to the inquirer's office or home are posted.

Mr. Redwood: Microfiche records requested and paid for in Companies house's satellite offices are not posted on to customers' offices or homes.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what system is used to transport company microfiche requested at satellite offices from Cardiff to those offices; and if this system is more expensive or cheaper to operate than if the same packets were sent to the satellites by Royal Mail.

Mr. Redwood: The system used to transport search requests to the satellite offices is operated by Britdoc Ltd. trading as British Document Exchange. This system is 50 per cent. cheaper than first-class post per item and 33 per cent. cheaper than second-class post.

EC Financial Directives

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in negotiations on the terms of the capital adequacy directive; and what issues remain to be determined.

Mr. Redwood: The Commission proposal for a directive to establish minimum capital adequacy requirements for investment firms and credit institutions conducting investment business was submitted to the Council in June. Negotiations are now under way in the Council working group. The directive as drafted represented a major improvement on earlier, unpublished drafts but it is clear that a number of member states favour higher minimum initial capital requirements. The Government's immediate concerns are to resist any increase in these initial requirements, to agree a satisfactory treatment of independent financial intermediaries, and to agree a satisfactory definition of those illiquid assets which must be deducted from the capital of investment firms. The Government's overall objective remains to negotiate a directive which genuinely relates capital requirements for individual firms to the risks to which those firms are exposed, and maintains the international competitiveness of the European Community.

Iraq (Supergun)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now make it his practice to answer any questions relating to the export of militarily sensitive supergun parts to Iraq.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 27 November 1990]:* Where I can add to the information provided by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on Second Reading of the Import and Export Control Bill, without helping the Government of Iraq (or any other would-be evader of export controls), I will answer questions which fall within my Department's area of responsibility.

Auditing Practices Committee

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date his representative on the Auditing Practices Committee was informed of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies' review of the Auditing Practices Committee.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* In mid-July.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Coinage

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in respect of the size of the new 5p piece.

Mr. Maples: A number of letters have been received.

Business Investment

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of business investment in 1991; and what is the level of business investment in *(a)* France, *(b)* Italy and *(c)* Germany, respectively.

Mr. Maples: In the autumn statement, business investment in the United Kingdom in 1991 was forecast to be £56 billion at 1985 prices.

The latest estimates of private non-residential investment—the standardised international definition which is closest to business investment—for the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy are for 1989. They are set out in the table as a share of GDP. The United Kingdom devoted a larger share of its GDP to private non-residential investment than the other three countries.

Private non-residential investment as a share of GDP, 1989

	Share of GDP
United Kingdom	13·9
France	12·6
Germany	12·8
Italy	[1]12·4

[1] 1988; 1989 not available.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The annual salary and fixed fee cost of appointments made by the Treasury is about £1 million a year. There are further appointments that pay a daily fee depending on involvement and most appointments pay travel and subsistence expenses. Details of this expenditure are not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

ENERGY

Piper Alpha Report

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the cost of technical and hardware measures outlined in the interim report of the Piper Alpha disaster and the Cullen report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The principal recommendations of Lord Cullen's report deal with broad principles of safety management rather than detailed technical or hardware measures. The cost of any measures required or thought desirable in the light of the application of these principles seems likely to vary from case to case, and it is not possible at this stage to make any overall estimate of additional costs attributable to the implementation of these recommendations.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the percentage of the cost of the technical and hardware measures outlined in the interim report of the Piper Alpha disaster and the Cullen report which will be met *(a)* by the oil companies and *(b)* by the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The extent to which the future cost of any such measures would be borne by the Exchequer would depend on a number of factors including the tax position at the relevant time of the oil or gas field, and of the company, in question.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provision he has made to ensure information concerning the privatisation of the electricity industry has been made available on tape and in Braille to assist blind people.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The production of offer for sale documents on tape or in Braille was ruled out on the grounds of excessive cost. Blind people do, however, have the option to telephone the share information office, which is able to answer a comprehensive range of simple questions.

Gas Leaks

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress he has made towards establishing reliable estimates of gas leakage from the low-pressure distribution system; whether his Department remains dependent on British Gas for such estimates; and what is the current best estimate for such leakage.

Mr. Moynihan: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Morrison) gave on 23 April 1990, at column 96. The Department of the Environment (DoE) has primary responsibility for emissions inventories and currently uses an estimate of 1 per cent. for methane loss in the natural gas distribution system.

Work is being undertaken by DoE, British Gas and others better to characterise all types of methane emission. This will be incorporated in the national estimates of total methane emissions in due course.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Wakeham: The information in respect of the Department of Energy for the financial years 1986-87 to 1990-91 is:

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91 (forecast)*
Number of new buildings[1]	—	—	—	—	—
Amount spent on new buildings[1]	—	—	—	—	—
Amount spent on repairs and maintenance[2]	£189,247	£71,704	£83,764	£231,542	£170,000
Amount spent on building renovation[1]	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Expenditure on the Department's new headquarters building over the period 1987-88—1989-90 was borne on the Property Services Agency's Vote.

[2] Expenditure on minor new works and maintenance within the Department's delegated responsibility under the Property Repayment Scheme rules.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the publication "Public Bodies" produced by the Cabinet Office, the latest edition of which will be published by HMSO later this month. The publication includes all appointments to bodies for which my Department is responsible except for the Director General of Gas Supply whose salary is in the range £53,420 to £63,390.

PRIME MINISTER

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any intention of setting up an inquiry into teachers' pay; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill currently before the House sets up new machinery under which the local authority employers and the teacher unions will be able to negotiate teachers' pay. The Government have undertaken not normally to intervene on cost grounds if the overall cost of recommendations resulting from those negotiations falls within the inter-quartile range of private sector settlements for non-manual employees.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Antarctica

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the Antarctic minerals convention.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We believe that the convention on the regulation of Antarctic mineral resource activities (CRAMRA) contains all necessary environmental safeguards, and that it offers the best way to resolve the minerals issue and protect the Antarctic environment. However, as we have always made clear, we are prepared to discuss all proposals.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Gross running costs expenditure on Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing administration was 9·86 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year; and for the aid wing it was 9·56 per cent. higher. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and GATT (Government procurement agreement (GPA)) where appropriate, this Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not at present subscribe to the Government supply index run by PI Ltd.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the latest issue of "Public Bodies", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library, which contains all the information he requires.

Biological Diversity

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the proposed UNEP biological diversification convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I have been asked to reply.

The Government fully support proposals for the elaboration of a global convention on conserving biological diversity. The United Kingdom has extensive and internationally respected scientific and technical expertise in this area and has taken a leading role in a series of preparatory meetings organised by the United Nations Environmental Programme. Formal negotiations are planned to begin in February 1991, with the aim of reaching agreement in time for the UN conference on environment and development which will be held in Brazil in June 1992.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is currently being carried out within the national health service into improved methods of withdrawing from benzodiazepines.

Mr. Dorrell: Professor Malcolm Lader and his team at the Institute of Psychiatry in London provide a service to NHS patients who wish to withdraw from benzodiazepines. The service offers both psychological and pharmacological methods of treatment and aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of approaches to this form of drug dependency.

Research into various aspects of dependency on benzodiazepines has been carried out in Yorkshire, West Midlands and South East Thames regions.

Military Medical Requirements

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the financial cost to the national health service of the cutback in military medical facilities since 1975.

Mr. Dorrell: Apart from the services provided to the dependants of military personnel, the treatment which military hospitals provide to civilians is undertaken to ensure adequate training and professional opportunities for the staff of such hospitals. It is not taken into account when determining the funding requirements of the national health service, or when allocating funds to regional health authorities.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of measures presently being undertaken in the national health service as a result of a possible military conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Dorrell: The national health service has at all times the function of ensuring that it is in a position to respond effectively to a major emergency. Contingency plans are reviewed regularly in the light of prevailing circumstances. The cost of maintaining this function is not held centrally.

North Nottinghamshire Health Authority

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the consultation period for proposals for the creation of a new North Nottinghamshire health authority began; when it ended; and on what date the consultation document was supplied to the hon. Members for the constituencies concerned.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering Trent regional health authority's proposal to proceed to formal public consultation. No document has yet been issued.

Benzene

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government's health advisers have now examined the evidence on exposure of the public to benzene in the atmosphere and its possible implications for public health; what conclusions have been reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: At a preliminary discussion recently the Department of Health's independent committee on carcinogenicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment (COC) concluded that benzene is a human carcinogen for which it is prudent to assume no safe level of exposure. This accords with the view of the International Agency for Research on Cancer and is based on evidence from heavily exposed occupational groups. Exposure of the general population from benzene in the environment, food and drink is at an extremely low level. The committee is now considering information on exposure levels including occupational exposures in order better to assess the risk to public health. Meanwhile the Department advises that exposure should be reduced as low as reasonably achievable.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will meet voluntary organisations to discuss the implementation of sections 1 and 2 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(2) when he last met voluntary organisations to discuss implementation of sections 1 to 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(3) when he next expects to meet voluntary organisations to discuss implementation of section 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986;

(4) when he last met local authority associations on sections 1 to 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement on the meeting.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I met representatives of the consortium of voluntary organisations, "Act Now", on 5 June, with the right hon. Member and other members of the all-party disablement group. I have no current plans for further meetings. Decisions as to further action on sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Act cannot be taken until our consultations with the local authority associations are complete. Officials last met the associations on 30 October.

Waiting Lists, Herefordshire

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the latest available figures for *(a)* urgent and *(b)* non-urgent hospital waiting lists for each district in Herefordshire.

Mr. Dorrell: At March 1990 there were 3,579 people on hospital in-patient waiting lists in Herefordshire district health authority compared with 3,648 at March 1989, a reduction of 2 per cent. Waiting list data have not been collected by urgency of condition since 1987.

NHS Reform (Leaflet)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will indicate the cost of the preparation and distribution of the leaflet "The National Health Service Reforms and You".

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for Health gave the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 5 July at column *675*.

Custard Tarts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning have been notified to his Department as a result of the consumption of custard tarts.

Mr. Dorrell: None specifically related to custard tarts. The public do not, however, always report foodborne illnesses to their doctor.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)*

the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of Health occupies buildings on the common user estate provided and administered by the Department of the Environment. Identifiable totals of the Department of Health's expenditure are available only from 1 April 1989 following this Department's separation from the Department of Social Security. In the financial year 1989-90 the Department of Health spent £2·292 million on new works not exceeding £150,000 each.

Details of the combined Department of Health and Department of Social Security major building projects are published each year with the supply estimates and details are in the Library.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Transplant Service

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has decided on the arrangements which are to be made to set up the United Kingdom transplant service as a special health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The report prepared by Dr. N. J. B. Evans has been considered and Ministers have decided, in general, to accept its recommendations. Regulations will be laid shortly to set up the authority. Dr. Evans will be appointed as its chairman. A copy of his report has been placed in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will itemise, by Department, the cost of the current year's state opening of Parliament.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The estimated cost to the Parliamentary Works Office is £45,500.

Workplace Nursery

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made on the feasibility study regarding a workplace nursery in the House; and if he has yet consulted the staff unions regarding carrying out the study and establishment of the nursery.

Mr. MacGregor: It is understood that the feasibility study by the Administration Department on the provision of child care facilities has been completed and is to be considered by the Services Committee at its next meeting. Copies of the study have already been made available to the trade union side of the House of Commons Whitley Committee, and there will be a further consultation with it and with other relevant staff organisations once the Services Committee has responded.

House of Commons (Reform)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to reform the workings of the House of Commons.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* I am always ready and willing to consider ideas for improvement. I shall, of course, be replying to the Procedure Committee on Select Committees.

THE ARTS

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Renton: Responsibility for the repairs and maintenance of the two properties occupied by my Department rests with the Property Services Agency (PSA). The payments made to it in respect of these works are given in the table.

	£
1986-87	26,747
1987-88	24,525
1988-89	36,333
1989-90	41,376
1990-91	52,983

Prior to 1 April 1988, responsibility for the building and maintenance programmes of the national museums and galleries that my Department sponsors and of the British library also rested with the PSA. Expenditure incurred by the PSA, but which was included in the central Government arts programme, was £34·5 million in 1986-87 and £34·0 million in 1987-88 in respect of the national museums and galleries, and £11·2 million and £21·8 million, respectively, for the British library.

From 1 April 1988, such costs have become the responsibility of the individual institutions, with that of the new British library building project at St. Pancras the responsibility of my Department.

The grant in aid provisions for the national museums and galleries building and maintenance programmes are:

Grant in aid
Building programme provision
(Amounts shown in £ millions)

Institutions	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
British museum	6·497	7·650	9·000
Imperial War museum	6·363	4·097	3·100
National gallery	3·255	4·390	5·100
National Maritime museum	1·853	3·450	4·600
National museums and galleries on Merseyside	2·690	3·060	3·800
National Portrait gallery	2·926	1·530	1·800
Natural History museum	6·172	6·260	8·100
Science museum	4·617	5·310	5·920
Tate gallery	3·236	3·800	4·800

Institutions	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Victoria and Albert museum	7·024	7·660	9·900
Wallace collection	0·271	0·482	0·627
Totals	44·904	47·689	56·747

Expenditure on the British library building project at St. Pancras is:

£ million

1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
23·3	41·4	49·2

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the level of repairs and maintenance needs in *(a)* theatres, *(b)* museums and *(c)* libraries.

Mr. Renton: I am setting in hand a new initiative to review and assess rigorously the building renovation needs of the national museums and galleries which I sponsor. This review, which will be undertaken by professional multidiscipline building consultants, will entail a detailed study of a variety of building conditions and other technical surveys. These will be compared against requirements already identified in museums buildings and the need for further technical studies identified if required. The review should be completed by summer 1991. The results will inform my decisions in carrying forward the Government's policy of bringing about the renovation of these important and historic buildings by the end of the decade; I am at present providing £189 million over the next three years towards these building and maintenance needs.

I understand that the Theatres Trust is carrying out a small study to establish whether a systematic examination of the national state of theatres could be undertaken at reasonable cost. It is for other relevant funding bodies, including local authorities, to determine the needs for the buildings within their areas of responsibility.

Funding Requirements

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what he estimates is needed by *(a)* the Arts Council, *(b)* the Museums and Galleries Commission, *(c)* the Crafts Council, *(d)* the British Film Institute and *(e)* the British library if their 1991-92 budgets are (i) to stand still in relation to inflation, (ii) return in real terms, to levels of (1) 1986-87 and (2) 1979-80 in cash terms and in percentage terms.

Mr. Renton: The future expenditure programme of the Office of Arts and Libraries and the particular provisions for the institutions it supports are defined in cash terms.

In comparison with 1986-87 and 1979-80, the 1991-92 expenditure programme will be higher in real terms by £86 million (18 per cent.) and £199 million (55 per cent.) respectively. No additional funding is needed, therefore.

Additional details for each of the institutions listed could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Renton: In general, those appointed by my Department to the institutions and committees it sponsors and supports do not receive fees or remuneration. They are normally reimbursed for travel and other expenditures which they incur as part of their duties, but detailed information on such reimbursements could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

There is an exception; part-time members of the British library board are remunerated for their services. The annual cost to the British library is currently £70,000.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

GCSE Examinations

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of students entered for GCSE examinations in the years 1988 to 1990 were from maintained further education institutions.

Mr. Eggar: In summer 1988, candidates from further education institutions accounted for about 4·4 per cent. of GCSE entries. In 1989, the corresponding figure was about 4·5 per cent. The figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science is he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Fallon: The Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are purchased by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement (GPA) where appropriate, the Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discriminiation on grounds of nationality.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Fallon: This Department does not subscribe to the Government supply index because the items currently covered by the index do not form a significant part of our expenditure and it has not therefore been economically viable to join the system. It follows that we are not privy to the information which would enable comparisons to be made.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Eggar: Gross running costs expenditure on DES administration was 8·7 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

Research Councils

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what advice he has received in the current year from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the level of science expenditure from public funds; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish the advice given to him by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils for the current year's public expenditure survey.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) on 19 November 1990 at column *30*.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairmen of the Agricultural and Food Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Science and Engineering Research Council to discuss the levels of their budgets; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend and I from time to time meet the chairmen and secretaries of each of the research councils. However neither of us has recently had any such meetings to discuss the levels of their budgets.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council has been submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy is being laid before the House today.

I was most interested to read about the council's achievements in the first full year after its move to Swindon. I noted in particular the council's introduction of a new method of allocating course work awards; its creation of a new training strategy; and its continuing commitment to the development of new centres of excellence.

I congratulate the council on these and its many other achievements, and look forward to reading about further progress in next year's report.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's own expenditure in respect of buildings is limited to those which are occupied by departmental staff. The information is given in the table.

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91 forecast*
Number of new buildings	0	0	0	1	1
Expenditure on new buildings (£000)	0	0	0	1,184	5,100
Expenditure on repairs and maintenance (including building renovations) (£000)	116	116	980	411	296

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Eggar: The estimated cost for 1990-91 of fees to people appointed by the Secretary of State to non-departmental public bodies is £775,000. In addition there are a number of appointments to other bodies which do not normally attract payment. Information about reimbursement is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Architecture Courses

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information his Department supplies to students, outlining alternative funding arrangements for those studying five-year architecture courses giving exemption from parts 1 and 2 of the RIBA examination in architecture, following the de-designation of such courses by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A circular letter sent by the Department in August to local education authorities and higher education institutions asked them to inform their affected students of the following arrangements for support in 1990-91:

(a) courses leading to a first degree or comparable qualification giving exemption from part 1 of the RIBA examination continue to be designated for mandatory student awards from LEAs;

(b) separate courses leading to further qualifications giving exemption from part 2 cannot for legal reasons remain designated but eligible students will instead receive equivalent bursaries under a temporary scheme.

Funds and detailed guidance have been provided for the institutions administering the scheme, and most eligible students should have received their bursaries. The Department publicised the arrangements again in September, and has continued to explain them in response to any individual inquiries from students or others. A further circular letter was issued last month on the handling of any outstanding cases.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the cost of the common agricultural policy to the United Kingdom expressed in terms of the average cost in food bills and tax for a family of four.

Mr. Curry: The Government have long recognised that the CAP system of agricultural support, in common with the support policies of other industrial countries, gives rise to substantial costs to taxpayers and consumers compared with a situation in which foodstuffs were imported at world market prices with no support to domestic producers. Estimates of these costs, and the savings that could be secured if current policies were ended, are possible only by making many assumptions. Important judgments are necessary about the current levels of world prices—no simple matter given the wide variations in quotations and substantial fluctuations from year to year—and the changes in these prices if present policies were abandoned. The latter depends on how producers and consumers throughout the world might respond to the new circumstances and on the impact on such factors as exchange rates.

Estimates made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, using a particular set of assumptions, imply that the transfers from consumers and taxpayers in 1989 resulting from agricultural policies in the European Community as a whole—separate figures for the United Kingdom are not available—were equivalent to £14 per week per family of four. (This is derived from the OECD estimate of the aggregate cost of 88·5 billion ecu for 1989, assuming the EC12 population is 324·8 million and that 1 ecu = £0·6733.) This is one estimate of the extent to which the CAP raises the cost of food and agricultural products, and incurs budgetary costs, compared to existing "world" prices. Those who quote this figure ignore the authors' note that the estimate is a static one: it takes no account of the effect that removal of farm support would have on world prices, and other variables, and thus gives no indication of the extent to which taxpayers and consumers might be better off if current policies were removed. A family of four would benefit by considerably less than £14 per week if all agricultural support were removed.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of reduced production due to set-aside in each year since its inception in tonnes of cereals and meat and also in value at real and 1990 prices.

Mr. Curry: The EC Commission has estimated that in the first year of the scheme 362,000 hectares were set aside in the Community representing a saving in production of between 1 million and 2 million tonnes of cereals. Recent information from the Commission suggests that a further 328,000 hectares have been set aside in the second year giving a total of 690,000 hectares which would represent a saving in production of between 1·9 million and 3·8 million tonnes of cereals. The Commission has not made available any estimates of value nor of impact on meat production.

Tributyltin

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what tests he has conducted for levels of tributyltin in fish and shellfish; if he will publish the results; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that fish stocks are prevented from contamination by the anti-fouling agent tributyltin; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what analysis he has carried out to assess the levels of tributyltin in United Kingdom coastal waters; and if he will publish the results.

Mr. Curry: The Department began a programme to measure tributyltin (TBT) levels in water, fish and shellfish in 1982. Measures to control the use of TBT were introduced in 1986 and 1987. These include a ban on the use of TBT anti-fouling paints on boats less than 25 m in length. Since that time this Department, jointly with the Department of the Environment, has commissioned a more intensive research and monitoring programme to assess the efficacy of these control measures. Reports on this work have been published at regular intervals in the scientific press and brief details were included in the directorate of fisheries research aquatic environment monitoring report No. 22, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House. Further more comprehensive and updated reports are currently in the process of being published. The results of this work show that TBT levels are declining and affected populations are recovering. Levels in the worst affected areas have declined by between six and ten-fold since 1986, as a direct result of the controls applied.

Work is now focused on establishing the most effective means of controlling inputs to harbours and other areas affected by the use of TBT anti-fouling paints on deep water ships.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry took on responsibility for vote accounting and project sponsorship for major new buildings projects and major improvements to the existing buildings two years ago. Prior to this time the Department of the Environment's Property Services Agency held this responsibility and I have no details of actual expenditure incurred on projects for earlier years. Since 1988 details of proposals for individual projects with a total forecast cost exceeding £2 million have been published in the major projects table annex of this Department's published estimates with lesser projects treated in aggregate. The total expenditure details for the 1988-89 and 1989-90 financial years are:

	1988-89	*1989-90*
Number of new buildings projects on which expenditure was incurred	11	12
Expenditure on new buildings projects (£ million)	8.62	8·40

	1988-89	1989-90
Expenditure on improvements to existing buildings (£ million)	7·35	1·40

The management of the maintenance of the Ministry's departmental estate was passed on from the DoE Property Services Agency on 1 April 1990. Previously the costs of repairs and maintenance were met by the Property Services Agency from sums recovered from Departments in the accommodation charge. I am therefore unable to publish figures.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Curry: This Department is responsible for appointments to a number of such bodies many of which attract the payment of fees and/or the reimbursement of expenses.

Because there are wide variations in the circumstances and in the manner in which these bodies are constituted, payments are made from a number of different accounts. Information on the totals is not collected centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Indications of the level of remuneration paid to appointees to public bodies are, however, available in "Public Appointments: A Guide for Women's Organisations" (Women's National Commission, June 1990) and "Public Bodies" published annually by the Cabinet Office. Copies of both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Canthaxanthin

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies have been carried out into the possible carcinogenic properties of the pigment canthaxanthin.

Mr. Maclean: The results of carcinogenicity studies carried out on canthaxanthin are summarised in the monograph drawn up by the FAO-WHO joint expert committee on food additives. The monograph was recently published and a copy is being placed in the Library of the House.

The United Kingdom expert committees do not consider canthaxanthin to be a carcinogen but are concerned that canthaxanthin can form deposits in the human retina.

I summarised the Government's action on canthaxanthin in my reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 4 November 1990 at column *64*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North- East of 21 November, if he will give for each of the benefits and superseded benefits that he listed *(a)* their monetary value or range of monetary values on 1 January of each year since 1961, *(b)* the current monetary values or range of monetary values and *(c)* those values in real terms related to the retail prices index, using 1 January 1961 or the nearest available date as the base of 100·0 in each case.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Injuries (Benefit)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Merseyside region of his Department have made claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit during the current year to date; how many have had their claims accepted; and what has been the total amount paid out in benefits.

Mr. Scott: In the period from 1 January to 31 October 1990, a total of 16,495 new claims have been received in all local offices covered by the Department's north western region. The table gives the number of claims received in each of the offices identified by the Department as being in Merseyside. Information about the number of successful claims and total amount of benefit paid is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Office	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*Total*
North West Region	1,495	2,193	1,744	1,503	1,788	1,530	1,484	1,461	1,527	1,770	16,495
Belle Vale	17	22	20	15	31	19	25	10	12	16	187
Bootle	25	37	30	30	51	29	30	21	21	18	292
Breckfield	54	38	23	16	7	18	19	20	38	27	260
City	5	15	9	13	13	17	9	8	5	5	99
Crosby	13	35	30	20	38	17	17	19	25	18	232
Edgehill	23	33	13	17	30	16	19	17	11	16	195
Garston	17	6	16	11	25	11	15	18	15	9	143
Huyton	21	42	30	16	43	22	26	25	30	21	276
Kirkby	31	63	24	21	38	23	22	20	20	19	281
St. Helens	83	84	118	79	99	86	86	109	68	96	908
Toxteth	9	21	6	12	13	21	18	9	14	7	130
West Derby	16	14	14	12	16	17	4	4	4	20	121
Southport	8	11	11	8	20	5	11	4	14	21	113

Community Care

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will respond to the Social Services, Committee's ninth report, "Community Care: Social Security for Disabled People"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We are in the process of examining and considering the contents of the report and we will be publishing our response in due course.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: Responsibility for new buildings, renovation and repairs is shared by the Department of the Environment and the Department of Social Security, and the division of this responsibility has changed over the period in question. It would not be possible to provide the information in the form requested except at disproportionate cost. However, new buildings for sole occupation by the Department have been completed as follows since April 1988, when the Department acquired responsibility for major works expenditure:

Year	*Number of new builds*	*Total cost (£ million)*
1988-89	2	2·689
1989-90	4	23·573
1990-91	3	15·770

The total cost includes expenditure incurred by the Department of the Environment prior to April 1988.

The total expenditure on new works and maintenance within the Department's delegated responsibility is given in the table. For the period prior to April 1989 the information covers the combined Department of Health and Social Security, and certain capital projects in which both the Department of Social Security and the Department of Health have an interest continue to be funded by the Department of Social Security.

Year	*New works*[1] *(£ million)*	*Maintenance (£ million)*
[2]1986-87	0·123	4·824
[3]1987-88	10·314	7·132
1988-89	[4]42·561	7·002
1989-90	89·001	7·735
[5]1990-91	91·181	[6]18·284

[1] New works expenditure encompasses all capital projects including new builds, renovations and adaptations as a result of changed operational requirements.

[2] For 1986-87, the Department was responsible only for certain new works and maintenance projects up to the value of £1,000.

[3] From 1987-88, the Department became responsible for certain new works up to a value of £150,000 and for maintenance projects up to a value of £5,000.

[4] From 1988-89, expenditure included all new works projects irrespective of value.

[5] The figures for this year are forecasts.

[6] From 1990-91, the Department became responsible for all maintenance projects on a proportion of the estate.

The hon. Member will be aware of the new works project at the Stoke North local social security office completed this year. The project involved adaptation and improvement of the reception and waiting areas at a cost of £360,000. This amount is included in the table.

SCOTLAND

Firearms

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received any representations concerning the implications for recreational shooters in Scotland of the implementation of article (5A) of European Community draft directive Com. 89 446 final, on the possession of firearms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Seven representations have been received in connection with this draft directive.

Military Casualties

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what hospitals have been designed for the treatment of military casualties in the event of conflict in the Gulf.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Crossroads (Scotland)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding will be made available for the Scottish charity Crossroads (Scotland) care attendant schemes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Local authorities and health boards are the main sources of funding to local Crossroads schemes. According to Crossroads' own statistics £669,000 was made available from these authorities in the financial year 1989-90. My Department is paying a grant of £23,865 in the current year. This meets approximately 30 per cent. of the costs of the headquarters organisation of Crossroads (Scotland) which provides direction and support to local Crossroads projects.

Action on Phobias Association

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding will be made available for the Scottish charity Action on Phobias Association, to pay for a development officer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The organisation's request for grant, one of many worthwhile applications competing for finite resources, is being considered at present. It is too early to offer any assessment of its likely chance of success but I hope that a decision will be reached early next year.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he has taken in respect of research into alcohol misuse and the social effects of alcohol misuse in Scotland; and how much money he has made available for this purpose in the current financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Alcohol misuse and alcohol-related problems have been identified as a priority area for research supported by the Scottish Office for many years.

Estimated expenditure on external alcohol-related research in the 1990-91 financial year is £15,000. Additional funds are available and applications for soundly based research projects will be sympathetically considered. In addition, an evaluation of experimental byelaws to prohibit the consumption of alcohol in designated public places is being conducted internally by the Scottish Office.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Lang: The annual remuneration paid to those appointed to non-departmental public bodies within my responsibilities as at 1 July 1989 is set out in pages 60 to 68 and 85 of the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1989", a copy of which is available in the Library. The 1990 edition is due to be published later this month. Information on the annual cost of reimbursement of expenses is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mature Students

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has received about the number of mature students who have been obliged to withdraw from courses in colleges of further education in the current academic year due to financial difficulties.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 November 1990]:* Apart from the cases raised in correspondence by the hon. Member himself, we have no evidence that there have been significant withdrawals by mature students in general.

In the current academic session only 10 mature students have withdrawn from those courses at Scottish colleges of further education which are supported under the students' allowances scheme. There is nothing to suggest that any of these students withdrew due to financial difficulties. Indeed, with the introduction of student loans, we have increased student support by 25 per cent. this session. We have also allocated some £1·06 million in access funds to Scottish further education colleges to distribute to students experiencing financial hardship.

Teachers

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure regional councils have consultative machinery with teachers which reflects the constitution of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* Consultative machinery at local level is a matter for regional and islands councils in consultation with the bodies representing teachers. It clearly makes sense to take into account the composition of national negotiating machinery for teachers when determining the local arrangements.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the level at which domestic rates in Wales would have to be fixed in 1990-91 in order to raise the same amount as under the community charge.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The estimated average rate bill per ratepayer for Wales in 1990-91 is £430 or 3 per cent. over 1989-90. For a detailed breakdown for each local authority I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 11 May 1990.

Community Care

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of funding for community care services in Wales in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available in precisely the form requested, but I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on Thursday 5 July 1990. Expenditure on community health services in 1989-90 was £108·5 million.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of community psychiatric nurses in Wales at the present time; and how many there were in 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is available only on the total staff in post for all nursing and midwifery staff. Between September 1979 and 1989 the whole-time equivalents of these had risen by 22 per cent. to 28,037 (this does not take into account the reduction in nurses' hours in 1980).

The Department is working closely with district health authorities to enable accurate breakdowns of these staff into areas of work to be made in future.

Rents to Mortgages

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current position regarding the rents-to-mortgages scheme in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In the first 12 months of the scheme 17 per cent. of eligible tenants have expressed an interest. More than 60 (nearly 8 per cent.) have applied to become flexi-owners. Fourteen sales (nearly 2 per cent.) have been completed.

Unadopted Streets

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his latest estimate of the number of unadopted streets in Wales and the cost of making up such streets;

(2) how many unadopted streets were adopted by each of the Welsh local authorities in each of the last 10 years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is not held centrally.

Employment Training

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales on the latest available figures went into full-time jobs after completing a course of employment training.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest results from the follow-up survey of employment training leavers show that 35 per cent. of respondents were in full-time employment three months after leaving the scheme. A further 10 per cent. were in part-time employment, voluntary work or further education.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales on the latest available figures are still unemployed having completed a course of employment training.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest results from the follow-up survey of employment training leavers show that 50 per cent. of respondents were unemployed three months after leaving the scheme.

Coal Exports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current level of coal exports from Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest available figures show that, in the six months to the end of June 1990, 178,048 tonnes of coal were exported from Welsh ports.

Registered Second Homes

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the number of registered second homes by district area as at *(a)* 1 April 1980, *(b)* 1 April 1985 and *(c)* 1 April 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available in the form requested. Some information on the proportion of second or holiday homes identified in each district during the 1986 Welsh inter-censal survey is published in table A1.2 of the report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Roads, Dyfed

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the rate of progress of regrading Dyfed roads.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Cardigan bypass is to be completed this month, ahead of schedule. Plans for other improvements to trunk roads are set out in "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s". A supplement updating this information is to be published in the new year. Improvements to local roads are a matter for Dyfed county council.

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build the eastern approach road in Aberystwyth during the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A feasibility study on the A44/A487 Aberystwyth approach roads, commissioned by the Department, has recently been completed. It is too soon to say what proposals might emerge from it.

Coal Imports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present level of coal imports into Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest available figures show that, to the end of June 1990, 1,829,552 tonnes of coal were imported into Welsh ports.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to extend the boundaries of the Development Board for Rural Wales to include parts of north Pembrokeshire, including Fishguard and Goodwick; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the further information referred to in his reply on Tuesday 27 November regarding Pembrokeshire health authority's national health service trust bid.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on Tuesday 4 December 1990.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sum of money he calculates would be adequate to provide a high-standard service in each county in Wales to tackle the problem of alcohol abuse; and on what he has based his calculation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for local and health authorities to determine and respond to local needs for alcohol misuse services as part of their normal development of services. Central Government support is being made available to encourage local initiatives, but should not be regarded as a substitute for local funding. A total of £150,000 has been earmarked this year to combat alcohol misuse in Wales.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the criteria on which organisations in Wales are being selected to receive part of the £150,000 funding for projects to help combat alcohol misuse announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at his Department on Drinkwise Day in June.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Guidance for organisations wishing to bid for a share of these resources is being issued this week and I shall be placing a copy in the Library of the House.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he has taken in respect of research into alcohol misuse and the social effects of alcohol misuse in Wales; and how much money he has made available for this purpose in the current financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given earlier today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of formal training days being given, since their inception, to the new district health authority members in Wales, by district health authority and in total.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department does not keep records of training that may be provided at the local level by district health authorities (DHAs).

At the all-Wales level, a one-and-a-half day briefing event was held for all new DHA members in October this year, to provide general briefing on the organisation and finance of the NHS in Wales. A one-and-a-half day induction course was also provided in November.

A further five-day programme covering such issues as strategic planning, care in the community, purchaser-provider roles, finance, contracts, resource management and medical audit is planned for the period January to May 1991.

NHS Reform

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the administrative cost of introducing the reforms affecting the national health service in Wales as itemised in the National Health Service and Community Care Act.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The estimated recurrent administrative cost of introducing the NHS reforms in Wales, as itemised in the financial and explanatory memorandum to the National Health Service and Community Care Bill is £8·650 million per annum.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has not financed any new buildings for its own use during the last five years. Expenditure incurred by my Department during that period on repairs, maintenance and improvements (renovation work is not separately identifiable) was as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure £*
1985-86	217,017
1986-87	225,195
1987-88	219,014
1988-89	299,405
1989-90	686,144

Expenditure incurred by the Property Services Agency on my Department's behalf is not included in these figures.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: Salaries of members of non-departmental public bodies are set out in "Public Bodies 1989", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Private Streets

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what detailed amendments to the law on the adoption of private streets he is considering; and when he intends to bring forward legislation;

(2) whether he intends to review and simplify the working of the private street works code to reflect experience of the Highways Act 1980 and subsequent Scottish law.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

After a review in 1983 of private street works law for England and Wales, it was decided to maintain both the principle of frontager liability and the arrangements for the adoption of private streets. Some minor amendments may be necessary in the future. Private street works law in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

EMPLOYMENT

European Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the reason for the delay in announcing ESF funding allocation.

Mr. Forth: There have been a number of difficulties with the implementation of the new requirements under the reformed ESF this year. A major cause of the delays was the late approval by the Commission of the operational programmes for 1990 onwards in August this year. It was only then that work on the individual applications for ESF support could start. Some 2,500 applications have been submitted, of which over 1,500 were received by my Department at the end of September. The vast majority had to be returned for revision because of errors. My Department is doing everything possible to expedite the process and to authorise payments to applicants.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average length of time schemes have been operating without funding whilst awaiting the outcome of the ESF bids.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available.

It is only once an application for ESF assistance has been approved, and a claim for a first advance payment made, that my Department is notified of the scheme's actual start date. Moreover, the European social fund provides only up to 50 per cent. of the funding of schemes.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to announce details of ESF funding arrangements.

Mr. Forth: My Department indicated in May this year the amounts of money likely to be available to the main groups of organisations involved in the European social fund in 1990. The European Commission gave its approval for our operational programmes only in August this year. Since then some 2,500 applications have been submitted,

of which 1,500 were received by my Department at the end of September. The vast majority had to be returned for revision because of errors. My Department is doing everything possible to expedite the process. Some payments have already been made and it is hoped to complete the process by the end of January.

Job Losses, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take to prevent further job losses following the recent loss of jobs at the Philips factory in Durham.

Mr. Jackson: Staffing levels are a matter for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned.

My Department, through its Employment Service and training, enterprise and education directorate, and through the training and enterprise councils, operates a wide range of employment, enterprise and training measures to help unemployed people find new jobs, retrain or set up businesses of their own.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Jackson: The gross administrative costs of my Department rose by 5·2 per cent. in the last financial year —considerably less than the retail prices index, which rose by 9·4 per cent. over the same period.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Forth: The best and worst purchases have been identified by comparing actual cost per unit with the Government's supply index average cost and are based on prices paid by those parts of the Department of Employment group subscribing to the Government's supply index.

	Actual price per unit £
Best price	
386 PC personal computers	985
Worst price	
Computer listing paper (per 1,000 sheets)	8·95

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Forth: The worst purchases have been identified by comparing actual cost per unit with the Government's supply index average cost and are based on prices paid by those parts of the Department of Employment group subscribing to the Government's supply index.

Ten worst—October

Description	*Actual price per unit* £
1. Exercise books	0·13
2. 3·5" floppy disks	1·87
3. Box files	2·93
4. Box files	2·71
5. Computer listing paper (1,000 sheets)	8·95
6. Battery	0·32
7. 5·25" floppy disk	0·77
8. 5·25" floppy disk	0·75

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Forth: My Department is bound by the Government policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price.

In accordance with that policy goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT GPA where appropriate, my Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Education Business Partnerships

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Government have for supporting local education business partnerships.

Mr. Howard: I am pleased to announce, on behalf of myself and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, that my Department has today issued a prospectus inviting training and enterprise councils to apply for funds to launch and extend local education business partnerships in collaboration with local education authorities and others.

Partnerships will be able to use the funds provided through TECs to support work experience for students and teachers, business visits to schools, science and technology projects and a wide range of innovatory activities bringing benefits to both education and business.

I am looking to TECs, local education authorities and other community organisations to build partnerships which help to raise the aspirations and achievements of students in education and training, of all ages or abilities and which contribute to our future prosperity.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland will make separate announcements about their arrangements for partnerships.

HSE Annual Report

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much the Health and Safety Executive's annual report costs *(a)* to produce and *(b)* to print; how much it is sold for; how many copies are sold; and how much profit is made on it.

Mr. Forth: The costs of producing the Health and Safety Commission's annual report vary from year to year. The most recent report (for 1988-89, published in

February 1990) cost approximately £34,000 to produce, of which the print costs were £14,834. The report is priced at £10; and 1,466 copies had been sold by end-October 1990. No profit has been made to date on sales of the report.

Youth Training (Accidents)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fatal, major and minor reportable accidents have occurred on YTS for each quarter since 1 October 1989; and what these figures were by region and as a percentage of total YTS trainees in each year.

Mr. Jackson: The table gives the numbers of fatal, major and minor reportable accidents which occurred in YTS for each quarter since October 1989, by region. The figures are provisional.

Accident rates are expressed as an annual rate per 100,000 trainees. The latest available figure for all accidents is 829 per 100,000 for the year 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990.

Region	*6 October 1989—December 1989*			*January 1990—March 1990*			*April 1990—June 1990*			*July 1990—September 1990*		
	Fatal	*Major*	*Minor*	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*
Scotland	1	25	72	—	19	69	—	28	87	—	13	59
Northern	—	14	95	—	7	93	—	12	89	—	9	62
North West	—	23	146	—	19	93	—	16	83	—	17	83
Yorkshire and Humber	—	20	104	—	14	74	—	22	79	—	11	60
West Midlands	—	19	80	—	13	56	—	26	66	—	9	49
East Mids and Eastern	—	20	75	1	11	57		9	48	1	10	27
Wales	—	20	61	—	9	53	—	13	46	—	4	34
South West	—	11	35	—	5	23	—	16	25	—	6	23
South East	—	13	40	—	12	23	—	15	38	—	5	28
London	—	5	13	—	1	7	—	5	17	—	3	12
Total	1	170	721	1	110	550	—	162	578	—	87	437

Notes:
1. Employment Department figures are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. However, the Employment Department's figures will include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments and road traffic accidents which may not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individual been employed.
2. Major accidents are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

Training

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been spent on training in the past year; what were the figures in 1975 and 1978 in real and money terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Records are kept on the basis of the standard financial year for Government expenditure, which runs from 1 April to 31 March.

The total expenditure on training by the Department of Employment group training, enterprise and education directorate (and its predecessors the Training Agency, Training Commission and the Manpower Services Commission) in 1975-76, 1978-79 and 1989-90 at cash and constant (1990-91) prices is as follows:

£ million

	Cash prices	*Constant (1990-91) prices*
1975-76	171·7	620·2
1978-79	377·3	954·3
1989-90	2,638·8	2,871·5

Figures are shown at cash and constant (estimated) 1990-91 prices calculated by use of the GDP deflator index from the Chancellor's autumn statement.

DEFENCE

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table:

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
New works expenditure (£ million)	880	905	886	1,018	1,155
Maintenance expenditure (£ million)	659	564	604	634	1,011
Major projects completed	9	11	12	6	Not available

Notes:
1. All figures relate to works and so encompass more than simply buildings.
2. Major projects are those with a works cost of more than £6 million.
3. Expenditure figures exclude PSA costs. 1990-91 figures reflect the transfer of responsibility between PSA and MOD, and so are not directly comparable with previous years.
4. 1989-90 and 1990-91 expenditure figures are derived from the original supply estimates. Earlier years are outturns.
5. Data on expenditure on building renovation are not separately available.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will detail the dates when the nuclear reactor systems of each submarine of the Valiant-Churchill and Polaris classes, together with the dates for the first two boats commissioned in the Swiftsure class, were last examined; and if any defects were found in the reactor system;

(2) if he will provide an estimated cost of the repairs and/or modifications required to correct the defects in any Polaris class submarines;

(3) if he will detail the nature of the nuclear reactor system defect in HMS Warspite, together with any findings or recommendations made at that time by or to his Department;

(4) when the defect of the pressurised water reactor coolant system in HMS Valiant was discovered;

(5) if he will detail the nuclear submarines in which the same type of reactor system defect exists as is present in HMS Warspite;

(6) when the nuclear safety certificate, or similar document, for HMS Conqueror was last issued; and what was the date on which this certificate ceased to be effective.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the last date on which a letter of authorisation was issued for the operation of the nuclear propulsion plant of *(a)* HMS Renown, *(b)* HMS Resolution, *(c)* HMS Repulse and *(d)* HMS Revenge; and if authorisation has since been rescinded;

(2) whether his Department is to seek financial compensation from Rolls-Royce for the generic nuclear reactor fault on submarines powered by the Rolls-Royce P1 nuclear reactor.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to comment on matters relating to the design of nuclear-powered submarines or on their material state. I can, however, confirm that our nuclear submarines operate in accordance with rigorous safety standards and with the endorsement of our independent safety advisers.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if work on the refitting of HMS Warspite and HMS Churchill extended beyond the date when the defect in the nuclear reactor system of each boat became known;

(2) if he will provide the overall cost of refitting *(a)* HMS Warspite and *(b)* HMS Churchill and list the cost of that section of the refit programme in both *(a)* and *(b)* completed after knowledge of the defect in the nuclear reactors came to light.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our practice to publish details of nuclear submarine refits. However, in a typical nuclear submarine refit the majority of the spend is incurred in the earlier stages, with relatively little incurred in the final stages. At termination in September 1990, Warspite's refit was substantially complete and Churchill was two thirds finished.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make public the findings of the nuclear warship safety committee that reviewed the safety of operation of the nuclear propulsion systems of the Valiant-Churchill and Polaris class submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The committee's advice is provided in confidence to the Secretary of State. I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence has acted fully in accordance with nuclear-powered warship safety committee advice regarding the operation and inspection of our nuclear submarines.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide the estimated and actual radiation dose equivalent uptake resulting from the current inspection programme of the nuclear reactor systems of the Valiant-Churchill and Polaris class submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not the Department's policy to comment on matters relating to the design of our nuclear-powered submarines or on their material state. The hon. Gentleman may be assured, however, that our stringent policy on radiological protection, which was commended by the House of Commons Defence Committee recently, is applied throughout the Department. Rigorous steps are being taken to keep all doses as low as reasonably practicable.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the number of weeks that each of the Valiant-Churchill and Polaris class submarine boats have put to sea under their own nuclear power propulsion during the last three years;

(2) if he will specify the last date when HMS Valiant put to sea under its own nuclear power propulsion system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our general practice to disclose such details of the operational movements of Royal Navy submarines.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will detail the stages and time scales involved in the decommissioning of nuclear-powered submarines;

(2) if he will provide an estimate of the number of civilian employees engaged at each stage of the decommissioning of each nuclear-powered submarine;

(3) if he will provide details of the decommissioning programmes for the HMS submarines Warspite, Churchill and Conqueror, stating when and at which royal dockyard each submarine is to be decommissioned; when, where and to what extent each submarine reactor compartment and its machinery is to be dismantled; when and where the radioactive components are to be stored or disposed of; when the remainder of each submarine is to be entirely dismantled and disposed of; when and where the submarines are to be laid up; and what is the anticipated cost for each submarine and the total costs of the entire decommissioning programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The first stage of the decommissioning programmes for each submarine will be a package of work contracted to Devonport Management Ltd. or Babcock Thorn Ltd. as appropriate in the royal dockyards, to defuel, de-equip and prepare each boat for a period of storage afloat. Detailed specifications for this work are being prepared and it is too early to determine time scale and cost. The manpower input, and hence employment consequences, are primarily a matter for the contractor. The subject of disposal of nuclear submarines is under active consideration but no final decision has yet been made.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department is undertaking discussions with the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive Ltd. with

regard to securing a means of storage and/or disposal of radioactive materials and components removed from nuclear-powered submarines during decommissioning.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: NIREX is aware, through routine contacts, of the MOD's potential requirements arising from the disposal of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under whose military command the Polaris class submarine comes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Commander-in-Chief Fleet.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individual Polaris class submarines have failed to undertake a scheduled patrol at any time during each of the last three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our general practice to disclose such details of Royal Navy submarine deployments. I can confirm, however, that Polaris submarine deterrent patrols have been, and continue to be, carried out in accordance with our policy to keep at least one such boat at sea at all times.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it was announced to the ship's company of HMS Valiant that the boat was to be withdrawn from active service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No such announcement has been made.

HMS Trenchant

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the steps his Department has taken to ensure that the log of the submarine HMS Trenchant for its operations during Thursday 22 November is made available for purposes of inquiries undertaken by statutory bodies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The relevant sections of the log will be made available to the investigating authorities as necessary.

Christmas Mail (Gulf)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *302*, if he will state what action he has taken to ensure that all families of British soldiers serving in the Gulf are informed that the final date for posting air mail parcels in time for Christmas at the forces concessionary rate is 1 December.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Detailed information on postal arrangements for forces mail to service personnel in the Gulf, including the latest posting dates for parcels under the forces concessionary rate, has been published through both official and welfare channels.

Within BAOR, from whence the majority of personnel deployed, the information has been published through forces radio, television and newspapers as well as information sheets at forces post offices and through discussions with wives' clubs.

Within the United Kingdom, similar information has been provided through unit families officers and welfare services, post office posters, and press releases by both the Royal Mail and the Ministry of Defence. In addition a Royal Mail parcelforce hotline (0800 224466) has been established specifically to deal with inquiries from members of the public on postal arrangements to the Gulf.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 December 1990

TRANSPORT

Train Passengers (Falls)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to require British Rail to publish the details and results of its investigations into the incidences of passengers falling from moving trains.

Mr. McLoughlin: This is a matter for British Rail to consider. Information on such incidents is contained in the chief inspecting officer of railways' annual report.

Aviation Fuel (Transport)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which emergency services were involved in the clean-up operation following the derailment and spillage of aviation fuel at the Isle of Grain on 28 November; what were the costs; and which body met each area of cost.

Mr. Freeman: Several organisations assisted at the scene of the accident, including the fire, police and ambulance services. I understand that the three emergency services were not directly involved in the clean-up operation and that they expect to meet their own costs. It is too early to know the total costs of the clean-up operation and the apportionment of them.

Defence Planning and Emergencies

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current responsibilities of the defence planning and emergencies division within his Department; how many full and part-time staff are employed; and what was the annual budget for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The current responsibilities of the defence planning and emergencies division are to develop and maintain plans for the use of surface transport, including shipping, in crisis and war; to maintain departmental civil emergency plans and emergency facilities within the Department of Transport; and to manage Government-owned wrecks and their cargoes. Thirty-four full-time staff are employed, one of whom is seconded to another Department.

The annual budget for the division over the past five years is as follows:

	£000s
1985-86	3,579
1986-87	3,432
1987-88	2,071
1988-89	2,795
1989-90	2,468

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department does not keep a central record of prices paid for each item purchased. Sample checks reveal that the prices paid for items on the GSI list were close to or lower than the GSI average prices.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement (GPA) where appropriate, the Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Driving Tests (Wales)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many driving tests have been completed in each test area in Wales; and what the success rate has been for 1988, 1989 and 1990 to date.

Mr. Chope: I have asked the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Rail Freight

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the Rail Freight Distribution United Kingdom Business Review report from the board of British Rail; and when it will be made public.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the British Railways Board is currently considering the conclusions of Railfreight Distribution's review. Publication of the report would be a matter for British Rail.

Vessel Modification

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the inspection of the vessel the Cam Spirit in December 1989 revealed about modifications to make her more manoeuvrable since her name was changed from the Silver Pit.

Mr. McLoughlin: The name was changed nine months after the inspection referred to. A survey was not required, nor was one undertaken. I understand, however, that substantial changes have been made to improve the reliability of the manoeuvring system.

London Underground

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to dismiss the chairman of London Underground unless London

Underground escalators at *(a)* St. John's Wood underground station and *(b)* elsewhere are in full working order by Saturday 15 December.

Mr. Freeman: No. A year ago we set London Underground Ltd. (LUL) a target of improved escalator availability, and LUL has made encouraging progress towards meeting that target. The target my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport set LUL in December 1989 was to increase overall escalator availability on the underground from 78 per cent.—1988-89 average—to 86 per cent. by 31 March 1992. Performance figures up to mid-September show LUL has achieved 84 per cent. I suggest the hon. Member discusses the availability of particular escalators with London Underground Ltd.

Offshore Installations (Safety)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what modifications have been made to his Department's code for standby vessels for North sea operations since the Piper Alpha disaster.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. A revised code was submitted to the public inquiry which will be amended in the light of Lord Cullen's recommendations.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Election Documents

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General (1) on how many occasions between 11 June 1987 and 31 August 1988 officers of MI5 were granted access to any parliamentary ballot papers and counterfoils and the marked electoral registers, returns, declarations and other election documents in the custody of the clerk of the Crown;

(2) on how many occasions between 11 June 1987 and 31 August 1988 civil servants were granted access to any parliamentary ballot papers and counterfoils and the marked electoral registers, returns, declarations and other election documents in the custody of the clerk of the Crown.

The Attorney-General: None, as far as is known. Under parliamentary elections rules set out in schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983, ballot papers, counterfoils and certificates of employment on duty on the day of the poll are to be produced only on the order of the House of Commons or a competent court. No such orders were received during the period mentioned. All the other election documents specified by the Act are required to be open to public access, and applicants are not required to state their occupations or purposes.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Attorney-General if he will detail the precautions taken to prevent unauthorised access to parliamentary ballot papers, counterfoils, marked electoral registers, returns, declarations and other election documents in the custody of the clerk of the Crown under schedule 1, part V, rule 55 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

The Attorney-General: Parliamentary election documents are stored in a locked warehouse on a 24-hour patrolled secure Government site in Greater London. Only selected staff of the Lord Chancellor's Department have access to the warehouse and its contents.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Attorney-General what was the number of orders made between 11 June 1987 and 31 August 1988 under schedule 1, part V, rule 56 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

The Attorney-General: No such orders for production of election documents were received during the period stated. The only documents produced were those where public inspection is authorised under schedule 1, rule 57(2), of the 1983 Act.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions between 11 June 1987 and 31 August 1988 police officers were given access to any parliamentary ballot papers and counterfoils and the marked electoral registers, returns, declarations and other election documents in the custody of the clerk of the Crown.

The Attorney-General: Under the parliamentary elections rules set out in schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983, ballot papers, counterfoils and certificates of employment on duty on the day of the poll are to be produced only on the order of the House of Commons or a competent court. No such orders were received during the period mentioned. All the other election documents, including marked election registers, specified by the Act are required to be open to public access, and applicants are not required to state their occupations or purposes. Applicants stating themselves to be police officers were given access to marked election registers on five occasions during the period mentioned.

Court of Appeal

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General how many convictions the Director of Public Prosecutions has defended before the Court of Appeal in each of the last five years; and in how many of these he did not express a view as to the innocence or guilt of the defendant.

The Attorney-General: Records maintained by the Crown prosecution service do not include a total figure for the number of cases proceeding to the Court of Appeal as appeals against conviction. The total number of appeals against conviction heard by the Court of Appeal between 1986 and 1990 is set out in the table; the vast majority would have been conducted by the Crown prosecution service.

It is only where exceptional circumstances prevail that the Crown prosecution service does not seek to resist an appeal against conviction; the number of such cases arising in each of the last five years could be ascertained only by a disproportionate expense to the taxpayer.

Appeals against conviction heard by full court

	Number
1985	528
1986	534
1987	343
1988	420
1989	500
1990	[1]569

[1]To 30 November.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: [illegible]sk the Attorney-General when the Director of Public Prosecutions is proposing to make available to solicitors for the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bomings all the material relevant to the preparations of grounds for appeal.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has disclosed a substantial amount of material to the solicitors representing the appellants. Arrangements are being made for the disclosure of outstanding material in his possession, insofar as this is appropriate in accordance with the Attorney-General's guidelines on disclosure. This has been explained to those representing the appellants. Any further material provided to the Director of Public Prosecutions will be considered and disclosed, if this is appropriate in accordance with the guidelines.

PRIME MINISTER

The Gulf (Ecological Consequences)

Q9. **Mr. Tam Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment has been made of the ecological consequences of a military option in the Gulf.

The Prime Minister: On any realistic estimate, the main effect would be to increase annual world CO_2 emissions by a small amount. Any environmental damage is undesirable, but the international community believes that the issues at stake are overriding. The way to avoid any of the consequences to which the hon. Member draws attention is for Saddam Hussein to comply with the resolutions of the United Nations and to withdraw from Kuwait.

Staff

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names, duties and grading of those now employed in his office.

The Prime Minister: The senior staff currently employed in my office and paid from public funds are:

Name	*Grade*	*Position*
Mr. A. Turnbull	Grade 2	Principal Private Secretary
Mr. C. D. Powell	Grade 3	Private Secretary—Overseas Affairs
Mr. D. C. B. Morris	Grade 5	Private Secretary—Parliamentary Affairs
Mr. B. Potter	Grade 5	Private Secretary—Economic Affairs
Miss C. A. Slocock	Grade 7	Private Secretary—Home Affairs
Mr. J. R. Catford	Grade 5	Secretary for Appointments
Mr. A. T. O'Donnell	Grade 3	Chief Press Secretary
Mr. T. J. Perks	Grade 5	Deputy Chief Press Secretary
Mr. C. Fountain	Grade 7	Security Co-ordinator
Mrs. S. Hogg	Grade 1A	Head of Policy Unit
Mr. J. Mills	Grade 5	Policy Adviser
Miss C. Sinclair	Grade 5	Policy Adviser

In addition, there are currently 56 employed on administrative and support duties. I am considering further appointments to my policy unit.

Downing Street (Gates)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to remove the gates to the entrance to Downing street.

The Prime Minister: No.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister when the Cabinet Office will issue an up-to-date edition of the document intituled "List of Ministerial Responsibilities."

The Prime Minister: An up-to-date edition will be deposited in the Library as soon as possible after ministerial responsibilities in Departments have been determined.

Department of Energy

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Prime Minister whether it is his intention to retain the Department of Energy as a separate Department.

The Prime Minister: My present expectation is that work in the energy area will justify the retention of a separate department at least until the end of this Parliament.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools, Wandsworth

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much central Government resourcing will be used to facilitate the setting up of *(a)* the Battersea Park city technology college *(b)* the ADT city technology college in Wandsworth and *(c)* a new Church of England voluntary aided school in Sutherland grove in terms of (i) money and (ii) lost value by virtue of releasing sites at less than market value.

Mr. Eggar: In respect of *(a)* and *(c)*, I would refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave on 3 December, at columns 14 and 15 respectively. No lease or sale of property for the purposes of establishing the institutions referred to by the hon. Member has taken place in either case. On *(b)*, the total capital cost of the ADT college, Wandsworth CTC will be £11 million of which the Department's 80 per cent. contribution will be £8·8 million. The site for the college was made available at relevant market value.

ENVIRONMENT

Trees

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in respect of the interim summary of the scientific review group on tree health in the United Kingdom; and when he expects the final report to be published.

Mr. Baldry: The terrestrial effects sub group report, "Air Pollution and Tree Health In the United Kingdom", will be published in March 1991. No interim summary will be published before that time. Copies of the final report will be deposited in the Library of the House.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department devotes considerable attention to its purchasing policy. It purchases a wide range of goods and services, which is only partly covered by the Government supply index. Where possible, note is taken of the prices obtained by other Departments, but potential suppliers are assessed against a number of other factors also, in order to obtain best value for money and take full account of environmental considerations. In the case of large or long-term contracts formal tendering procedures are followed. A great many current purchases are made at advantageous rates under long-term or call-off contracts negotiated some time ago. It is therefore not possible to make a meaningful comparison of present prices within the GSI against those obtained by the Department's purchasing procedures.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government's policy is that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality, fitness for purpose and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement where appropriate, my Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail price index in the last financial year.

Mr. Heseltine: The outturn for my Department was only 6 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in 1988-89—less than the increase in the retail prices index between those two years.

Birds Directive

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will consider contesting the legal action pending against the United Kingdom for non-compliance with the 1979 birds directive.

Mr. Baldry: We recently learnt that the European Commission may bring forward a proposal for amending the relevant provisions of the directive. We shall consider what action may be required when the Commission has clarified its intentions, but we hope the matter can be settled without referral to the court.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will urge his colleagues in the Council of Ministers to recommend to the European Commission the reinstatement of the pests annex to the 1979 birds directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We intend to raise the question of pest control under the directive at the next meeting of the Environment Council.

Connection Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has about the rate of increase in connection charges for new house building by each utility company since privatisation;

(2) what discussions he has had with utility companies regarding the future level of increase of connection charges for new house building.

Mr. Baldry: Under section 79 of the Water Act 1989, a new system of infrastructure charges was introduced from 1 April 1990 for new connections to domestic water or sewerage services. The initial limits on these charges set by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales are increased each year in line with the retail prices index.

Increases in other charges made by companies, including any other charges related to connections, are restricted to the increase in the retail prices index plus the K factors set by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the next 10 years and laid down in companies' instruments of appointment, copies of which are available in the Library.

Both the K factors and the limits on infrastructure charges are now subject to review and amendment by the Director General of Water Services.

Urban Programme

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive a report from Victor Hausner and Associates on its research into the use of the urban programme in creating employment opportunities for black and ethnic minority communities in the inner cities.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the final report of this research project early in 1991.

Local Authority Accounts

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sanctions exist against local authorities in breach of their statutory duty to produce accounts for audit; and what action he proposes to take against those in serious breach.

Mr. Portillo: Any person failing without reasonable excuse to comply with the statutory requirements is liable to prosecution. The auditor is best placed to judge whether such legal action is warranted or likely to succeed.

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities which are currently in breach of their statutory obligations to produce their annual audit accounts, setting against each the number of years of default.

Mr. Portillo: The Audit Commission issued in February a list of 29 local authorities in England and

Wales which had failed to publish their 1988-89 statements of accounts before the statutory deadline of 31 December 1989. I am arranging for a copy of the list to be placed in the Library of the House. The commission's annual report for 1989-90 stated that nine of these authorities had still not published 1988-89 accounts by June 1990.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The following tables show the information requested in respect of:

(1) the building work funded up to March 1990 by the Property Services Agency, and thereafter by Property Holdings, as part of their responsibilities for the management of the Civil and Parliamentary Estates;

(2) the Department of the Environment's own accommodation.

The figures reflect the gradual transfer of responsibility for new building and maintenance services to occupying departments throughout the period. Information on the number of new building projects prior to 1 April 1988 is available only at disproportionate cost.

(1) Civil and Parliamentary Estates

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89 (iii)*	*1989-90*	*1990-91 (Forecast) (iv)*
a. Number of new building projects, including renovations and acquisitions (i) (ii)			39	37	32
b. Amount spent on new buildings, including renovation (£ million)	211	301	194	102	102
c. Amount spent on repairs and maintenance (£ million)	147	134	169	187	166

(2) Department of Environment (v)

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91 (Forecast)*
a. Number of new building projects			2	1	3
b. Amount spent on new buildings including renovation (£ million)			4	3	2
c. Amount spent on repairs and maintenance (£ million)	20	23	27	28	29

Notes:

(i) a new building "project" is any construction costing more than £150,000 which is not wholly maintenance;
(ii) number of projects in construction at 30 September each year; most projects span several years and therefore appear more than once;
(iii) in 1988 occupying departments became responsible for funding new building projects in specialised buildings and single occupations;
(iv) in 1990 occupying departments took on substantial responsibility for funding maintenance work. 1990-91 figures include fees in addition to works costs;
(v) excludes PSA's own occupation but includes Property Holdings, Building Research Establishment and the occupied and unoccupied royal palaces.

WALES

Private Streets

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider means by which assistance from public funds could be provided for those people no longer benefiting from a related rate reduction to contribute to the frontagers' costs of making up private streets to a satisfactory standard.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. The apportionment of costs incurred in making up private streets to a satisfactory standard is a matter for the individuals and local authority concerned.

Pembrokeshire Health Authority

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that consultations with the public and with national health service staff in Pembrokeshire regarding the proposed national health service trust shall be carried out objectively and independently of the health authority.

Mr. David Hunt: A decision on whether to approve a formal application for NHS trust status is subject to a statutory three-month public consultation period. In Wales this will be undertaken by the Welsh Office.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates and reference numbers of any circulars and other publications issued by his Department in respect of alcohol abuse since November 1980.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The following circulars on alcohol misuse have been issued since November 1980:

WOC 8/89; WHC 89(14) Alcohol Misuse—20 February 1989

WHC 90(78) Central Funding Initiative to Combat Alcohol Misuse in Wales: 1990-91 and 1991-92—5

December 1990
WHC 90(79) Combating Alcohol Misuse in Wales: The Next Steps—5 December 1990

The main publications sponsored and/or distributed by the Department are as follows:

"Dealing with Alcohol Problems in Wales"—Health Education Advisory Committee for Wales, January 1987.
"Improving Services for Problem Drinkers in Wales"—Alcohol Concern Wales, 1988.
"Alcohol in the Workplace, A Guide for Employers"—Department of Employment—issued in Wales 29 November 1989.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a breakdown by counties in Wales of the distribution of funds out of the funding for projects to help combat alcohol abuse announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at his Department on Drinkwise Day in June; and if he will list the organisations receiving cash in each county.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Allocations have not yet been made. However, bids have been invited by 31 December 1990 and I hope to make an announcement early in the new year.

Drug Misuse Patients

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish statistics for each Welsh health authority, for the number of drug misuse patients in Wales who receive treatment outside their district health authority areas.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements have been made for giving directives to ensure that district health authority meetings will be open to the press and public.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett Health authorities are subject to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. This requires a considerable degree of openness in their affairs. Advice was recently issued to health authorities on this matter; this was contained in section 11 of Welsh health circular (90)57, copies of which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are classed as homeless in *(a)* Ynys Môn and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of persons accepted as homeless during the September 1990 quarter is shown in the following table:

	Number
Ynys Môn	35
Wales	5,337

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the specific Welsh Office responsibilities *(a)* to which he will give personal oversight and *(b)* which he will delegate to each of his ministerial colleagues at the Welsh Office.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today announced the allocation of ministerial responsibilities within the Welsh Office. They are:

Secretary of State, the right hon. David Hunt, MBE, MP: overall responsibility for the whole Department taking a special interest in economic matters, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, industry, Welsh Development Agency and Development Board for Rural Wales, energy and environment policy, Cardiff bay, Programme for the Valleys, financial and revenue support grant issues, European Community issues, constitutional issues, training and enterprise councils.

Minister of State, Sir Wyn Roberts, MP: education and training, small businesses and rural affairs, Wales tourist board and tourism generally, transport and highways, Welsh language, arts, National Library and National Museum of Wales, historic buildings and ancient monuments, Countryside Council for Wales, national parks, conservation, general issues relating to public appointments.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Mr. Nicholas Bennett, MP: health and social work, housing, water and environmental protection, local government, land use planning, urban affairs, including urban programme and urban development grants, enterprise zones, sport.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what resources are to be made available to Tai Cymru in the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: In gross terms the resources available to Tai Cymru will be over £117·4 million. Taking account of associated private sector funding, the overall programme will be worth above £150 million next year. I am delighted that this will secure a further tranche of over 3,000 unit completions in 1991-92.

The package of resources to be made available to Housing for Wales over the four-year period to 1993-94 will now total nearly half a billion pounds. The total allocation of over £480 million means a 36 per cent. increase from 1990-91 to 1993-94; by when the allocation will have virtually trebled in cash terms from five years ago.

I am glad that Tai Cymru continues to make good progress in achieving strategic development of housing associations in Wales: by the close of its third full year of operation, and taking account of the provision that I have been able to make this year, Tai Cymru should have increased housing association dwelling stock by over a third.

As regards current expenditure, I shall be making available £4·8 million in 1991-92—an increase of £3 million over 1990-91—to cover the costs of the special needs management allowance scheme introduced in Wales this year. The scheme is of particular significance in carrying forward our strategies for vulnerable groups in Wales. I intend that its impact should be kept under continuing review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the level at which domestic rates in Wales would have to be fixed in 1990-91 in order to raise the same amount as under the community charge.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[pursuant to his reply, 5 December 1990, c. 148]:* Owing to a typing error an incorrect figure was given. The correct answer is as follows. The estimated average rate bill per ratepayer for Wales in 1990-91 is £430 or 31 per cent. over 1989-90. For a detailed breakdown for each local authority, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 11 May 1990.

EMPLOYMENT

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the level of funding for the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Jackson: Around 130 written representations have been received on this subject this year.

Local Office Closure, Northumberland

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why he proposes to close his Department's jobcentre and benefit office in Amble, Northumberland.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will examine the roles of further education colleges, some sixth forms, and youth training providers to identify and discourage any duplication or waste in staff, premises, equipment and operational costs.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils are being given new responsibilities for business education partnerships and work related further education and will be closely involved in TVEI planning. The councils are well placed to address questions of efficiency and resource allocation, in partnership with local education authorities and independent educational institutions.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take frequent soundings of existing partners in education and training to ensure training and enterprise councils have the best available information on current and developing positions, and to give confidence to companies, schools, careers and managing agents that changes will be negotiated and not imposed.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is in regular contact with education and training interests and their views are always taken into account. In addition, I expect training and enterprise councils to consult relevant organisations in their local area.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what incentives he intends to offer to encourage smaller companies to support human resource development through jobs with training.

Mr. Forth: The Government are committed to encouraging all firms, including small ones, to invest more effectively in the skills which their businesses need. This commitment is fully reflected in the prominence given to this issue in the strategic guidance for training and enterprise councils (TECs). The TECs are responding with plans for a wide range of activities and incentives to support this objective, all of which are tailored to meet particular local circumstances.

Training and enterprise councils and the national training task force are also introducing a new initiative, "Investors in People", which is designed to encourage all companies, including smaller ones, to appreciate the business benefits of effective training. Effective training and development will be formally recognised as "Investors In People". This will be important to customers and potential employees.

New Businesses

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the latest weekly figures for net new business registrations.

Mr. Forth: During 1989, the latest period for which figures have been published by my Department, the number of businesses registered for VAT increased by nearly 1,700 a week on average. Early indications from data collected by HM Customs and Excise is that there continues to be a substantial surplus of registrations over deregistrations.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Labour and Social Affairs Council meeting held in Brussels on 26 November.

Mr. Howard: The Government welcome the result of this Council.

The Council formally adopted the health and safety directive on biological agents, and reached a common position on a directive to control the use of asbestos at the workplace. A decision on an action programme in favour of the elderly was agreed as was a resolution on the comparability of vocational training qualifications.

There was a lengthy discussion of the directives concerning part-time and temporary work, as proposed by the European Commission under its social action programme. A clear majority of member states had significant difficulties with the substance of the proposals; and they also agreed that article 100A of the treaty, as proposed by the Commission, was an inappropriate treaty base and that directives of this kind required unanimity in the Council.

A large majority of the delegations agreed with the United Kingdom that rapid progress could now be made towards agreeing the proposed directive on the health and safety of temporary workers.

There was also discussion of regulations concerned with the free movement of labour and social security entitlements for migrant workers. Some of the other member states had difficulties with the current draft texts.

The Council was given a progress report by the presidency on the social action programme as a whole, and the Commission gave a report on immigration and the Community.

The Commissioner of Social Affairs introduced her report on implementation of existing EC social legislation throughout the Community. It indicates that the United Kingdom leads all other member states; indeed, we are the only member state to have implemented all the Community directives in the social affairs field.

Overall, the United Kingdom was pleased to be able to agree to a number of sensible, well-prepared proposals in the areas of health and safety at work, training and improvements to the labour market. The Government will continue to oppose vigorously any EC legislation which would damage either job prospects in the United Kingdom and the rest of the Community or the competitiveness of our industries.

This Social Affairs Council was a further example of how the rest of the Community often shares the views of the United Kingdom when they address specific proposals for legislation or action.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* In 1989-90, the last financial year for which information is available, the annual cost to the Employment Department Group of fees and reimbursements was as follows:

	Fees	*Reimbursements (£'000)*
People appointed to:		
Public bodies	307	91
Non-governmental bodies	9,315	834
Other bodies	—	—

This reply does not include information on the former Training Agency, now absorbed into the Department, which could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

ENERGY

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department follows the Government's policy to base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, taking into account quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery. Goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. My Department also observes EC and GATT requirements for Government purchasing where appropriate and encourages small firms to compete for its business.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Wakeham: This information is not available because my Department does not currently subscribe to the Government supply index (GSI). It spends only a comparatively small amount on items covered by the index so that membership would not represent good value for money.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Wakeham: Gross running costs expenditure on my Department's administration was 37·2 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent. The increase was mainly due to two factors. First, the Department was charged the full market rent by the then Property Services Agency for its new headquarters building, although the actual rent paid by the PSA, and hence the real annual cost to the taxpayer, was substantially less. Secondly, the Department needed to increase its staff to prepare for the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales and to strengthen resources devoted to offshore safety.

Connection Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has had from the house building industry regarding assurances on the future level of electricity connection charges post-privatisation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: About half a dozen letters have been received from the building industry on this subject.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the directors general of Ofgas and OFFER regarding the rate of increase in connection charges for gas and electricity for new house building.

Mr. Wakeham: None. The reasonableness of gas and electricity connection charges is a matter for the respective directors general.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the 75 renewable-sourced projects covered by the first order of renewables under the non-fossil fuel obligation giving the location, type of generator and capacity in megawatts in each case and identifying those projects which would have proceeded without benefit of the above market price available under the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Wakeham: Following is a list of the 75 projects citing location and technology. Some of the generators concerned have not given approval for the capacity of their projects to be published, and I am, therefore, unable to give project-specific information. The 75 projects that the RECs have concluded contracts with in fulfilment of their

obligations have an aggregate installed capacity that will build up to some 170 MW. Over half the 75 projects, and over two thirds of the capacity provided by those projects, are attributable to new projects which would not have been able to go forward without the support of a NFFO contract.

Generator	*Project site*	*Project type*
Wessex Water Business Services Ltd	Maundown, Avon	Hydro
South West Water Services Ltd	Plymouth, Devon	Hydro
South West Water Services Ltd	Okehampton, Devon	Hydro
South West Water Services Ltd	Okehampton, Devon	Hydro
Ralph Adams	Chippenham, Wiltshire	Hydro
The National Trust	Neath, Glamorgan	Hydro
Glen Lyn Generations Ltd	Glen Lyn Gorge Hydro-electric scheme	Hydro
John Brooke & Sons Holdings Ltd	Hudersfield, Yorkshire	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Manchester Ship Canal	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Coniston, Cumbria	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Manchester Ship Canal	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Manchester Ship Canal	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Glenridding, Cumbria	Hydro
Northern Hydro Ltd	Manchester	Hydro
R. J. Armstrong Evans	Ashburton, Devon	Hydro
R. J. Armstrong Evans	Tavistock, Devon	Hydro
Greta, Lady Wales	Garnedd, Dolwyddelan	Hydro
Severn Trent Water Ltd	Llanidloes, Powys	Hydro
Severn Trent Water Ltd	Oswestry, Shropshire	Hydro
Ingleby (451) Ltd	Gwynedd	Hydro
Welsh Water	Powys	Hydro
PJO Wheeler	Harbertonford, Totnes	Hydro
Hydro Energy Development	Derbyshire	Hydro
Hydro Energy Development	Derbyshire	Hydro
Derwent Hydro	Milford, Derbyshire	Hydro
ECC International Ltd	St. Blazy, Cornwall	Hydro
Merseyside Development Corporation	Otterspool	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	Todhills, Carlisle	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	Fleetwood, Lancashire	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	White Lund, Lancaster	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	Stretford, Manchester	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	Oldham, Manchester	Landfill Gas
NORWEB Generation & Land Fill Gas Ltd	Swinton, Manchester	Landfill Gas
Biffa Waste Services	Chorley, Lancashire	Landfill Gas
Landfill Gas Ltd	Ambergate, Derbyshire	Landfill Gas
Landfill Gas Ltd	Crich, Ambergate, Derbyshire	Landfill Gas
Shanks & McEwan (Southern) Ltd	Brogborough, Bedfordshire	Landfill Gas
Shanks & McEwan (Southern) Ltd	Brogborough, Bedfordshire	Landfill Gas
Shanks & McEwan (Southern) Ltd	Calvert, Buckinghamshire	Landfill Gas
Shanks & McEwan (Southern) Ltd	Martley, Worcestershire	Landfill Gas
Shanks & McEwan (Southern) Ltd	Martley, Worcestershire	Landfill Gas
Cory Environment Ltd	Stanford le Hope, Essex	Landfill Gas
Thomas Graveson Ltd	Witton, Norwich	Landfill Gas
Thomas Graveson Ltd	Worthing, West Sussex	Landfill Gas
BFI Packington Ltd	Meriden, Coventry	Landfill Gas
Tarmac Econowaste	Staffordshire	Landfill Gas
Blue Circle Industries plc	Dartford, Kent	Landfill Gas
Blue Circle Industries plc	Strood, Rochester, Kent	Landfill Gas
ARC Ltd	Offham, Kent	Landifll Gas
ARC Ltd	Tuttle Hill, Warwickshire	Landfill Gas
Heybush Ent. Development	Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire	Wind
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd	Nr. Denholme, Yorkshire	Wind
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd	Addinhan, Yorkshire	Wind
Wind Electric Ltd	Nr Dalabole, Cornwall	Wind
PowerGen plc	Richborough Power Station, Kent	Wind
Renewable Energy Systems Ltd	St Mary's Isle of Scilly	Wind
UK Wind Farms Ltd	Mydydd Cemmaes, Powys	Wind
UK Wind Farms Ltd	Nr Ulverston, Cumbria	Wind
National Power	Carmarthen Bay, West Glamorgan	Wind
Wessex Water Business Services Ltd	Bristol	Biogas
Wessex Water Business Services Ltd	Avon	Biogas
Haul West Ltd	Kingsteington, Devon	Biogas
North West Water Ltd	Lancashire	Sewage Gas
North West Water Ltd	Tameside, Lancashire	Sewage Gas
South West Water Ltd	Exeter, Devon	Sewage Gas
North West Water	Manchester	Sewage Gas
North West Water	Lancashire	Sewage Gas
Isle of Wight County Council	Forest Park, Newport	Waste Incineration
Energy Supplies Ltd	Byker, Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Waste Incineration
North London Waste Authority	Edmonton, London	Waste Incineration
Coventry City Council	Coventry, West Midlands	Waste Incineration
Elm Energy UK	Wolverhampton, West Midlands	Waste Incineration
Fibropower Ltd	Dias, Suffolk	Chicken Litter

Generator	Project site	Project type
Fibropower Ltd	Scunthorpe, Humberside	Chicken Litter
Hanford plc	Piddlehinton, Dorset	Pig Slurry

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Animal Experiments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ban those animal procedures involving LD50 and Draize tests.

Mr. Leigh: In respect of cosmetics products, the United Kingdom industry has eliminated LD50 testing except where occasionally required by certain overseas countries and has eliminated Draize testing with concentrated chemicals.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Leigh: My Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement where appropriate, my Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Leigh: The Department is not a participant in the Government supply index scheme.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Leigh: Allowing for machinery of Government changes, gross running costs expenditure on Department of Trade and Industry administration was 8·7 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

British Satellite Broadcasting

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to whether the Director General of Fair Trading is examining the total financial liability faced by United Kingdom-based manufacturers and retailers currently holding stocks of British Satellite Broadcasting reception equipment and as to whether the Director General of Fair Trading is to examine BSB's compliance with its contracts with manufacturers and retailers.

Mr. Redwood: The director general is aware of the position facing manufacturers and retailers holding stocks of British Satellite Broadcasting reception equipment and has received representations from, among others, retailers of this equipment. The commercial contracts between BSB and the manufacturers and retailers of its equipment are a matter for the parties concerned who may, if necessary, have recourse to the courts in the normal way in the event of any breach of contract. The DGFT is advising the Secretary of State on the wider issues of the merger.

Corporate Registrations

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the growth of corporate registrations.

Mr. Redwood: A total of 1,032,200 companies were registered under the Companies Acts in Great Britain between 1980 and 1989. This compares with 521,000 companies registered in the previous 10-year period. The annual series since 1980 is as follows:

Great Britain company registrations

	(thousands)
1980	69·4
1981	72·4
1982	87·2
1983	96·2
1984	97·9
1985	104·6
1986	117·3
1987	128·0
1988	128·9
1989	130·3
[1]1990	104·6

[1] January to October.

Further information can be found in "Companies in 1989-90", a copy of which is available in the Library.

European Commission Financial Directives

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received any new proposals for directives on financial services for the European Commission in the past six months; and whether he has been notified of any forthcoming such proposals.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* There have been three main new proposals for directives on financial services from the European Commission in the last six months. In the insurance field proposals for the non-life framework directive (OJ No. C244; 28/9/90) and the insurance committee directive (Com. (90) 344—final) were submitted to the Council in September 1990. The Commission also put a proposal to the Council on 3 October for a directive on consolidated supervision of banks, replacing the consolidated supervision directive of June 1983.

I have been notified of two major forthcoming proposals on which my Department will be in the lead. In the insurance sector, a proposal for a life framework directive is expected shortly. The Commission is also

expected to propose, before the end of 1992, a directive harmonising arrangements for investor compensation throughout the EC.

British Aerospace

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contact he has had with British Aerospace plc regarding possible redundancies.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* Mr. John Weston, the managing director of British Aerospace (Military Aircraft) Ltd. has announced that about one third of the expected 5,000 job losses will be achieved by natural wastage. For other employees affected by the decision, the company has announced a series of supporting measures including job shops, retraining, relocation, self-employment start-up assistance and early release terms. No announcement has been made giving any estimate of the redundancies which will be required.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds are being provided in 1990-91 specifically to help people withdraw from benzodiazepines.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1990-91, £15·5 million has been allocated to regional health authorities, which are responsible for developing local treatment services including those which offer help to people wishing to withdraw from benzodiazepines.

Agency Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the national health service in the Doncaster district health service for staff who have been employed through agencies as nurses, operating department assistants, ancillary and other staff.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information derived from the 1989-90 annual accounts of the Doncaster health authority is as follows:

Expenditure on Non-National Health Service (Agency etc.) staff

	£
Nursing	11,108
Ancillary	Nil
All other staff (including medical and dental)	184,417

Expenditure specifically on the employment of operating department assistants is not collected centrally.

For more detailed information I suggest the hon. Member contacts Mr. J. G. S. Smith, the health authority chairman.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index;

(3) what was his Department's best and worst purchases as measured against the hospital supply index for the current month.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department does not subscribe to the Government or hospital supply index.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Gross running costs expenditure on Department of Health administration was 9·0 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than the estimated expenditure in 1988-89, when the major part of the Department of Health's running costs were combined with those of the Department of Social Security in the appropriation accounts. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

Zimovane

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the price approved by his Department for the drug Zimovane manufactured by the company Rhone Poulenc; and how much is paid for that drug in other European countries.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The United Kingdom system controls the overall profit that companies make from the sales of all relevant products to the NHS; it does not approve the price of individual medicines.

The United Kingdom price of Zimovane is £27·44 for 28 tablets. We do not hold price details for European countries generally.

Hospitals

Mr. Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of hospitals in England and Wales where patients and staff have been the victims of violence within the past two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. Appropriate security arrangements for the protection of both patients and staff are the responsibility of, and can best be determined by, health authorities in the light of their knowledge of their premises and the degree of access necessary for patients and visitors. We are making £20,000 available to update the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts' security manual which is the key reference document in this area.

Mortality Rates (London)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the perinatal, *(b)* infant and *(c)* overall mortality rates by social class in the London regional health authorities in 1970, 1980 and the latest date available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The exact information requested is not available. The available information is shown in the tables.

Perinatal and infant mortality by social class (as defined by occupation) 1980
(Births within marriage only)
Perinatal deaths per 1000 total births.
Infant deaths per 1000 live births.

Social Class	Perinatal deaths	Infant deaths
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
All	10·4	10·4
I-V	10·4	10·2
I	8·7	7·0
II	9·1	9·5
III	11·3	10·6
IV	10·7	11·8
V	12·8	15·5
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
All	13·1	11·1
I-V	13·0	10·7
I	10·5	8·3
II	13·4	10·7
III	12·2	9·2
IV	14·3	13·4
V	19·2	21·4
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
All	12·0	11·5
I-V	11·9	11·2
I	4·6	5·4
II	10·9	10·0
III	12·2	11·1
IV	15·7	15·6
V	14·8	15·4
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
All	10·5	10·4
I-V	10·1	10·0
I	7·1	7·3
II	9·5	9·8
III	10·5	9·4
IV	14·3	15·4
V	9·7	14·6

Perinatal and infant deaths by social class (as defined by occupation) 1988 (births within marriage only)
Perinatal deaths by 1,000 total births
Infant deaths by 1,000 live births

Social class	Perinatal deaths rate per 1,000 total births	Infant deaths rate per 1,000 live births
North West Thames regional health authority		
All	7·5	7·3
I-V	7·4	7·2
I	7·2	6·8
II	4·9	5·3
IIIN	8·3	7·3
IIIM	8·3	8·7
IV	10·8	9·3
V	[1]11·8	[1]5·4
North East Thames regional health authority		
All	8·7	7·2
I-V	8·5	6·9
I	7·9	7·0
II	8·3	6·1
IIIN	7·4	6·4
IIIM	8·4	6·5
IV	10·5	8·8
V	[1]9·6	[1]11·0
South East Thames regional health authority		
All	8·1	7·9
I-V	8·1	7·8
I	10·1	6·5
II	5·8	6·4
IIIN	8·4	7·7
IIIM	8·8	7·8
IV	10·5	11·2
V	[1]8·7	[1]12·4
South West Thames regional health authority		
All	7·3	8·0
I-V	7·1	7·8
I	[1]4·0	7·6
II	7·0	6·0
IIIN	6·7	6·7
IIIM	7·8	8·4
IV	10·5	12·2
V	[1]8·4	[1]14·5

[1] Indicates rates calculated from less than 20 deaths to warn the user that their reliability as a measure may be affected by the small number of events.

Deaths by social class (as defined by occupation) 1971
Rates per 1,000 population for males aged 15-64

Metropolitan Regional Hospital Area	Total	Social class I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
North West	5·3	3·9	4·8	5·4	5·7	7·4	9·1
North East	5·5	3·6	4·9	5·2	5·6	7·1	8·5
South East	5·7	4·0	5·4	5·7	5·7	7·9	8·9
South West	5·5	4·1	4·9	5·6	5·9	7·8	9·8

Deaths by social class (as defined by occupation) 1981
Rates per 1,000 population for males aged 16-64

Regional Health Authority	Total	Social class I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
North West Thames	4·5	3·0	3·7	4·2	5·1	6·1	8·3
North East Thames	4·7	2·9	3·7	4·3	5·3	6·5	8·7
South East Thames	4·8	3·2	4·2	4·5	5·1	6·4	8·2
South West Thames	4·2	3·0	3·8	4·4	4·7	6·0	7·1

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service men who have not attained the age of 18 years have been posted to the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Numbers of service personnel under the age of 18 currently in the Gulf are as follows:

	Number
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	37
Army	[1]18
Royal Air Force	2

[1] Total figure according to returns received to date from units serving in the Gulf.

Absenteeism

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel went absent without leave for each year since 1986, giving categories showing the approximate lengths of time for which people have been absent, the number of absentees below the ages of 21 and 18 years, and the varying levels of absenteeism in different commands and trades.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 22 November 1990]:* The information which is held centrally for each of the three services is as follows:

Royal Navy

Approximate length of absence	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Under 1 month	52	58	66
1 to 3 months	4	13	7
3 to 6 months	2	3	7
6 to 12 months	2	5	5
1 to 2 years	—	—	3
2 years +	2	—	—
Total	62	79	88
Absentees Under 18	30	24	39
Absentees Under 21	2	10	7

Note: Records of absentees by Command or trade are not held.

Army

Approximate length of absence	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
3 weeks to 3 months	251	239	284
3 to 6 months	87	129	157
6 to 12 months	57	86	164
1 to 2 years	48	66	140
2 years +	65	51	—
Total	508	571	745
Absentees Under 18	26	39	38
Absentees Under 21	262	313	450

Record of absentees by Command

Last recorded theatre	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
BAOR	161	214	241
Cyprus	5	7	3
Gibraltar	2	1	5
Hong Kong	—	2	1
Others	13	8	12
United Kingdom	327	339	483
Total	508	571	745

Note: All figures exclude those who went absent in previous years.

A breakdown of total absentees by career employment qualification is as follows

	1987	*1988*	*1989*
Army Air Corps Soldier (Clerk)	—	—	1
Army Air Corps Soldier	3	—	1
Air Survey Technician	—	—	1
Ammunition Technician	—	1	—
Amphibious Engineer	—	—	5
Armoured Engineer	—	1	—
Armourer	—	—	1
Bandsman	1	1	—
Bricklayer and Construction	—	2	—
Combat Engineer	4	10	7
Combat Lineman	1	1	—
Combat Medical Technician	5	2	5
Combat Signalman Royal Engineers	—	1	1
Combat Signalman	—	2	—
Chef	4	5	6
Clerk	3	3	4
Clerk Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	1	—	—
Command Post Assistant (Field)	—	3	—
Command Post Assistant (Surface to Air Missiles)	1	—	—
Design Draftsman	1	—	—
Drone Operator	—	—	3
Driver	19	14	30
Driver Electrician	2	1	2
Driver Lineman	—	2	2
Driver Radio Operator	—	1	2
Driver Royal Engineers	2	—	2
Driver Royal Army Ordnance Corps	1	—	—
Driver Tank Transporter	—	—	1
Electrician Royal Engineers	1	—	—
Fitter Royal Engineers	—	—	4
Gunner Driver Royal Engineers	10	9	16
Gunner Field Guns	21	23	32
Gunner Surface to Air Missile Lights	—	4	1
Gunner Surface to Air Missile (Shoulder Launch)	3	1	2
Gunner Surface to Surface Missile	1	—	—
Infantry Soldier	233	243	384
Military Accountant	3	1	3
Mounted Gunner	1	—	—
Military Police (General Police Duties)	—	—	2
Metalsmith	1	—	1
Operator Artillery Intelligence	—	1	—
Petroleum Operative	2	—	—
Pioneer Royal Pioneer Corps	13	10	6
Plant Operator Mechanic	—	1	2
Plumber Pipe	—	2	—
Painter and Decorator	2	—	—
Postal Courier Operator	—	—	2
Physical Training Instructor	—	1	—
Radio Operator	2	2	2
Royal Armoured Corps Soldier	6	5	4
Radio Operator Field	—	1	—
Radio Relay Operator	1	3	3
Radio Relay Technician	—	1	—
Signaller Royal Artillery	5	3	9
Staff Clerk	1	—	—
Storeman Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	—	3	—
Storeman Technical	—	2	—
Stores Accountant	1	1	—
Supply Controller	1	3	3
Supply Specialist	9	3	5
Technician Aircraft	1	—	—
Technician Instrument	—	—	1
Technician Radar (Rapier)	—	—	2
Telecommunications Operator (Data)	1	2	1
Telecommunications Operator (Linguist)	—	1	—
Telecommunications Operator (Radio)	—	—	1
Telecommunications Operator (Telegraph)	2	4	3
UNALLOCATED	132	184	175
Vehicle Electrician	—	1	1

	1987	1988	1989
Vehicle Specialist	1	—	—
Vehicle Mechanic A Vehicles	—	1	1
Vehicle Mechanic B Vehicles	6	5	5

Note: Absentees listed as unallocated are those without a specialist trade and thus not allocated to a career employment qualification group or for whom the career employment qualification is not recorded centrally.

RAF

Approximate length of absence

	1987	1988	1989
Under 1 month	232	161	205
1 to 3 months	8	11	7
3 to 6 months	4	1	1
6 to 12 months	1	—	1
1 year plus	14	2	2
Total	259	175	216

Note: Figures include those who returned from previous years but exclude those still absent.

Absentees

	1987	1988	1989
Under 18	6	1	5
Under 21	88	46	84

Record of absentees by Command

Last recorded Command	1987	1988	1989
Germany	10	8	9
HQ Strike Command	151	110	141
HQ RAF Support Command	50	37	42
Others	16	9	11
Non effective[1]	38	12	4
Total	265	176	207

[1] Non effective personnel are those absent for more than 28 days.
Note: Figures include those who went absent and are still absent.

A breakdown of RAF absentees by trade group is as follows

	1987	1988	1989
Trade Group			
1. Aircraft engineering	50	20	3
2. Air Electronic Engineering	8	5	4
3. Ground Electronic Engineering	9	11	7
4. Obsolete	—	—	—
5. General Engineering	8	10	6
6. Mechanical transport	24	13	17
7. Marine craft (now obsolete)	7	—	—
8. Security	30	30	31
9. Air Traffic Control	8	6	5
10. General Service	18	8	9
11. Telecommunications	13	11	13
12. Aerospace Systems Operating	5	7	6
13. Safety and Surface	8	12	8
14. Photography	9	—	2
15. Medical	2	1	—
16. Dental	1	0	0
17. Accounting and Secretarial	10	9	9
18. Supply and Movements	24	24	29
19. Catering	27	8	26
54. Apprentices	—	—	3
Others	11	—	—

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Ministry of Defence are listed in the booklet "Public Bodies". This gives information on overall expenditure and the level of fees paid.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence appoints annually a number of individuals on secondment to public, non-governmental and other bodies. The number of individuals seconded at the end of 1989 was as follows:

Public bodies—21
Non-governmental bodies—172
Others (Industry and Commerce)—173

The financial arrangements are agreed on an individual basis and further details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December.

Mr. Hurd: A meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council took place in Brussels on 4 December. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and I represented the United Kingdom.

There was a useful discussion of preparations for the intergovernmental conference on political union. The Council confirmed that the IGC would set its own agenda, and agreed that the European Council should consider the full range of options which had emerged during the preparatory discussions. The Council had an informal discussion on the financial situation of eastern European countries and the food situation in the Soviet Union. The Commission will put detailed proposals to the European Council. The Council adopted the package of transitional measures integrating the former GDR into the EC.

Ministers discussed the situation in the Gulf and reaffirmed their support for the relevant Security Council resolutions and their condemnation of the Iraqi treatment of hostages. They sent a message of support to President Menem of Argentina after the recent attempted rebellion by certain elements of the army. In a discussion of immigration issues, my hon. Friend underlined the importance for the United Kingdom, as an island, of maintaining essential checks at our ports and airports. Member states noted the need for a co-ordinated approach to this large, and growing, problem. There was a short, but inconclusive discussion on the budget for the expanded MEDIA programme.

The Commission gave a progress report on its efforts to identify new EC aid projects for the occupied territories. On behalf of the Council, the presidency had a meeting with the President of the European Parliament to discuss amendments proposed by the European Parliament to the EC regulation providing financial assistance to Jordan, Egypt and Turkey.

Gibraltar

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Gibraltar.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The treaty of Utrecht established British title to Gibraltar and it remains under British sovereignty. The same treaty also gave Spain the right of "first refusal" if Gibraltar ceased to be British. None of this is or has been in dispute between the United Kingdom and Spain.

Britain's commitment to the people of Gibraltar, enshrined in the 1969 constitution, is well known. This Government will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. The 1969 constitution also sets out the division of powers between the elected Government of Gibraltar and the British Government. It bestows an appropriate level of self-government for domestic matters while preserving British sovereignty and reserving necessary powers to Britain. As regards Gibraltar airport, the British Government have frequently emphasised that development could not proceed against the wishes of the Gibraltar Government and people.

The British Government are fully committed to the negotiating process with Spain (the Brussels process) aimed at overcoming all the differences between the British and Spanish Governments over Gibraltar. It covers the question of sovereignty, as well as mutually beneficial co-operation. Spanish sovereignty over Gibraltar would be possible only if acceptable to the Gibraltarians. Under the treaty of Utrecht independence is not an option, unless Spain is prepared to agree.

The Government are actively seeking to improve relations between Gibraltar and Spain and, as a significant aspect of this, working for increasingly close local co-operation which will be beneficial for the whole region. This would be in full accordance with the spirit of the CSCE, and of developments in the European Community of which Gibraltar is part. Such co-operation can flourish only on the basis of mutual confidence. We hope that all parties will act in a way that builds trust and leads to progress.

Third-world Debt

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the amount of provisions against third-world debts set aside by commercial banks on which tax relief was allowed in the latest year for which figures were available; and what was the total tax relief allowed.

Mr. Maude: I have been asked to reply.

The reduction in mainstream corporation tax receipts for 1989-90 is estimated at £$\frac{1}{3}$ billion. The corresponding provisions allowable for tax relief amount to about £1 billion.

SCOTLAND

Educational Psychologists

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figures he has on *(a)* the total numbers of children referred by their schools to see educational psychologists and *(b)* those currently waiting to do so.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the actual and the recommended numbers of educational psychologists in each local education authority.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The full-time equivalent number of educational psychologists employed in regional and islands psychological services in Scotland as at September 1989 was:

	Number
Borders	4·0
Central	20·0
Dumfries and Galloway	10·0
Fife	22·0
Grampian	26·0
Highland	13·0
Lothian	33·4
Strathclyde	160·5
Tayside	23·5
Orkney	2·0
Shetland	2·0
Western Isles	2·0
Scotland	318·4
Strathclyde Divisions	
Argyll and Bute	4·0
Ayr	23·0
Dumbarton	20·0
Glasgow	50·0
Lanark	41·0
Renfrew	22·5

Source: School Census return SC6.

It is for education authorities themselves to determine the number of educational psychologists they require to assist them in carrying out their functions.

MFV Antares

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will hold a fatal accident inquiry into the recent sinking of the MFV Antares with the loss of her four-man crew.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The procurator fiscal at Kilmarnock is investigating the circumstances of the loss of this vessel and will report to Crown counsel. A fatal accident inquiry is mandatory in any case involving a death resulting from an accident in the course of employment.

Deaf-blind Children

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaf-blind children are currently enrolled in primary and secondary schools; what provisions have been made for them; and what plans for improvement are to be implemented in the near future.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Disabled Pupils

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children confined to wheelchairs are currently enrolled in primary and secondary schools; and what information he has on the number unable to be offered places due to lack of funds or facilities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase transport expenditure in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has made provision in 1991-92 totalling £375 million for expenditure on roads and transport by central Government and for capital expenditure by local authorities. Although expenditure provision in 1991-92 will be lower than in 1990-91 it has risen substantially in recent years.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Industry

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the state of the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 29 November at column 1008.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the present state of the dairy industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: In 1988-89 dairy farming was the most profitable sector of agriculture in the United Kingdom. More recently dairy incomes have been under pressure as a result of rising costs at a time of lower prices for calves and static milk prices. The problems of structural surplus are again apparent and it is clear that the Community milk regime needs to give greater weight to market forces. Furthermore, I remain of the view that both United Kingdom dairy farmers and the dairy industry generally would benefit from a move away from the present statutory milk marketing arrangements towards a more competitive system.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the chairman and executive members of the Sea Fish Industry Authority, their terms of office, remuneration and from whence they were recruited for these posts.

Mr. Curry: The chairman and other members of the authority were appointed on 1 October 1990 and the deputy chairman on 1 December. Appointments are normally for a three-year period, but Ministers may, under certain circumstances, terminate an appointment at any time during that three-year period.

The board comprises 12 members appointed by Ministers. The chairman and deputy chairman and two other members are independent members who have no direct financial or commercial interest in the fishing industry. The other members are drawn from various sectors of the fishing and fish processing industry and the industry is consulted on their appointments. These members represent the industry as a whole rather than their own particular sector. The chairman receives £25,490 and the deputy chairman £11,909 and the other board members £5,330 per annum for their services.

Names of the authority's board members and their position are given in the table. Further biographical details were given in the MAFF news releases 296/90 of 30 August, 321/90 of 25 September and 385/90 of 4 December, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Independent Members
Mr. John MacKay *(Chairman)*
Mr. Eric Davey, JP *(Deputy Chairman)*
Professor Mike Haines
Mr. Frank Ledwidge, OBE, FCA

Industry Representatives
Mr. John Adams
Mr. John V. Cradock
Mr. William Hay, CBE
Mr. Duncan Macinnes, JP
Mr. Ian McFadden
Miss Elizabeth Stevenson
Mr. David Vickers
Mr. Colin Warwick

Beef

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the local authorities which currently have a ban on eating beef in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available. All local authorities have been advised of the chief medical officer's view that British beef can be eaten safely by everyone. The Agriculture Committee's report on BSE endorsed this view.

Fishing Boats

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to take action to control the use of tributyltin used by fishing boats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The use, sale, supply, advertisement or storage of tributyltin (TBT) paint for use on vessels under 25 m or on fish and shellfish farming equipment was made an offence under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 as from 1 July 1987. This ban covers more than 98 per cent. of the United Kingdom fishing fleet. The United Kingdom is playing a leading role in international discussions of the need for further controls to limit TBT contamination from, for example, dry dock operations and larger vessels.

Waste Disposal

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to publish his annual report on the disposal of waste at sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: A report on the licensing of waste disposal at sea in 1988 and 1989, together with results of the Ministry's monitoring of the marine environment in those years is being finalised for publication. It is expected to be published in March 1991.

Poultry Flocks (Salmonella)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on compensation for salmonella-infected poultry flocks.

Mr. Gummer: I have considered carefully the outcome of a recent arbitration case in which the National Farmers Union, on behalf of 11 flock owners, disputed the amount of compensation paid for poultry flocks which had been compulsorily slaughtered. The arbitrator decided that the payments to the flock owners concerned should be increased. This will be done, in accordance with the terms laid down by the arbitrator.

I have also decided to alter the compensation arrangements for all other producers who have received, or will receive, compensation after the date of the arbitrator's award on 25 September. With effect from that date compensation will be calculated on the basis of the full value of the number of birds in the flock, other than the estimated number of diseased birds for which there is no requirement for the payment of compensation under the Animal Health Act 1981. The number of diseased birds will be calculated on the basis of the level of infection in the flock estimated from the examination of samples. The precise method of calculating compensation on this basis will be discussed with industry organisations. The new arrangements are expected in most cases to result in a significant increase in the amount of compensation paid to flock owners.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance is given to his Department's officers to decide an appropriate level of remuneration for part-time work undertaken by those claiming income support.

Miss Widdecombe: The chief adjudication officer is responsible for providing guidance to the Department's adjudication officers, who decide all questions relating to entitlement to income support. Normally, a claimant's gross part-time earnings, less any appropriate deductions, are used when calculating how much benefit can be paid. In a small number of cases, however, earnings are assumed where a person receives no earnings for the work done, or less earnings than is paid for comparable work in the locality. But this rule does not apply to charitable or voluntary work, or where there is evidence that the employer cannot afford to pay higher wages. Adjudication officers are advised, therefore, to consider the nature of the employment, and to compare the rate of pay with that for similar work in the area and any evidence provided by the job centre. The detailed guidance is contained in the adjudication officer's guide, paragraphs 29,251 to 29,400, a copy of which is in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the recently announced increase in child benefit for the only, elder or eldest child in the family is to be made an overlapping benefit in respect of the contributory benefit child dependency increase.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 16 November. I can confirm that the adjustment to which my hon. Friend referred will be provided for by means of an amendment to the Social Security (Overlapping Benefits) Regulations 1979.

Elderly People (Carers)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the number of *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* families engaged in full-time unpaid work caring for physically or mentally handicapped elderly persons in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. In September 1990 there were approximately 130,000 people receiving invalid care allowance, of whom 82 per cent. were women. A recipient of this benefit must provide at least 35 hours care per week to a severely disabled person who receives attendance allowance or constant attendance allowance.

The 1985 general household survey identified 1·4 million people who devoted at least 20 hours each week to caring.

Pensions

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of allowing men and women to retire at 60 years on 80 per cent. of the national average wage.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The cost of providing state retirement pensions to men and women at age 60 has been estimated at £3 billion a year at 1985-86 prices.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of paying pensioners £100 per week over the present rates.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of increasing the state retirement pension by this amount would be approximately £45·5 billion per year.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail price index in the last financial year.

Miss Widdecombe: Overall, the administrative costs of the Department increased by more than the retail prices index in 1989-90. This figure includes a large capital investment programme in respect of the computerisation of the benefits system, which will produce substantial savings in later years. If this element is excluded, the administrative costs rose by slightly less than the retail prices index.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the ratio between the pensions of single people and couples; and when it was last reviewed.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no basic retirement pension rate for married couples as such. The full category A pension for a single person stands currently at £46·90. A married man on this rate of pension can claim an adult

dependency increase (ADI) of £28·20 for a wife under 60 years of age; a wife over pensionable age could receive a category BL pension in her own right at the same rate, based on her husband's contributions. Since 1973, both the ADI and the category BL pension have been uprated in line with the single category A pension. This has meant that the ratio of the ADI or category BL to the single category A retirement pension has remained at about 60 per cent. since 1973.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reasons for his decision to reduce the level of specific grant assistance to direct housing benefit and community charge benefit from 1991-92 for the district councils in the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Miss Widdecombe: The reduction in the rate of direct benefit subsidy from 97 per cent. to 95 per cent. which will apply to all authorities in Great Britain, is a modest adjustment in the balance between direct and indirect subsidy, designed to promote economy and efficiency in the handling of public funds.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many awards of attendance allowance were for periods of *(a)* two years, *(b)* one year, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* six months, and *(e)* any other period of less than three years, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the precise form requested. Such information as is available is in the table. I understand that it is not the normal practice for the attendance allowance board to issue certificates to new beneficiaries for less than a year. The vast majority of short period certificates are issued on occasions when we need to ensure that there is no break of entitlement on renewal claims or during the processing of a review.

Awards made during period 1 October 1989 to 30 September 1990

	Lower rate	*Higher rate*	*Total*
Under 1 year	228	138	366
1 to 2 years	11,942	7,536	19,478
2 to 3 years	9,641	5,777	15,418
Total under 3 years	21,811	13,451	35,262

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the cost of the reduction of the five-year age limit for the mobility component of disability living allowance to *(a)* three years and *(b)* two years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his estimate of the cost of abolition of the five-year age limit for the mobility component of disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The number of potential beneficiaries from a reduction in the lower age limit for the mobility component cannot be predicted with any great degree of certainty. Our best estimate, however, based on analyses of the OPCS disability surveys is that the abolition of the age limit would cost about £35 million a year; a reduction in the age limit to three years would cost about £25 million and a reduction to two years about £30 million.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of reduction of the three-month waiting period for disability living allowance to *(a)* two months and *(b)* one month; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The costs would be *(a)* about £35 million a year and *(b)* about £65 million a year.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of abolition of the three-month waiting period for disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The cost would be about £100 million a year.

Benefit Values

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give the cash level of benefits in November 1979 and April 1991, and the real-terms change in the value using the change in the retail price index or Rossi index, as appropriate, between November 1979 and September 1990, using November 1979 as 100 for (i) retirement pension, (ii) unemployment benefit, (iii) sickness benefit, (iv) industrial disablement benefit, (v) industrial death benefit, (vi) maternity allowance, (vii) war disablement pension, (viii) war widows pension, (ix) attendance allowance, (x) invalid care allowance, (xi) severe disablement allowance, (xii) child benefit for first and second and subsequent children separately and (xiii) one parent benefit giving, where appropriate, the single and couple and higher and lower rate separately;

(2) if he will give the cash level of benefits in November 1979 and April 1991, and the real-terms change in the value using the change in the index for average gross weekly earnings, all full-time workers on adult rates in all industries and services, excluding those whose pay was affected by absence between November 1979 and September 1990, using November 1979 as 100 for (i) retirement pension, (ii) unemployment benefit, (iii) sickness benefit, (iv) industrial disablement benefit, (v) industrial death benefit, (vi) maternity allowance, (vii) war disablement pension, (viii) war widows pension, (ix) attendance allowance, (x) invalid care allowance, (xi) severe disablement allowance, (xii) child benefit for first and second and subsequent children separately and (xiii) one parent benefit giving, where appropriate, the single and couple and higher and lower rate separately.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not yet possible to calculate the "real-terms" change in the value of benefits that are due for payment in April 1991, and it would not be meaningful to make calculations to average benefit rates over a particular period on the basis of movements in prices over a different period. Nor is it meaningful to calculate a "real-terms change" by reference to an index of earnings.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Speech Therapy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the annual cost incurred through purchasing special speech therapy services etc. for Northern Ireland children provided outside the United Kingdom in each of the last five years;

(2) how many children required special speech therapy which has to be obtained outside Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not held centrally, but I understand that such referrals as do occur are extremely rare.

Chernobyl Accident

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the areas, and the size of each of those areas in acres, together with the number of sheep affected, which are still under restrictions arising from the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and indicate the percentage fall of radioactivity in *(a)* the peat, *(b)* the vegetation and *(c)* the sheep, since the accident occurred; and when he now expects to be able to remove restrictions on the movement of sheep in those areas.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* Restrictions on movement and slaughter of sheep in Northern Ireland apply in the following areas:

	Glenshane County Londonderry	*Belraugh County Londonderry*	*Glenwherry County Antrim*
Acreage	10,744	2,247	8,620
Estimated number of breeding sheep	11,300	3,000	7,000

Monitoring of radioactivity levels in survey flocks has demonstrated no significant fall in radioactivity levels.

The available research data from sampling of vegetation and soil/peat does not allow firm conclusions to be reached.

It is not possible to predict how long restrictions will need to stay in force. They will be lifted as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising the safety of the food chain.

Chernobyl Accident

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigations have been carried out to determine the effect of the Chernobyl accident on those rivers in Northern Ireland which drain the areas affected by the accident; if any rise in radioactivity has been observed in the waters of those rivers and streams during *(a)* drought conditions and *(b)* flood conditions; whether any rise in radioactivity has been observed in the flesh of (i) trout, (ii) coarse fish, (iii) salmon or sea trout and (iv) smelts of salmon or sea trout; and if there has been any attempt to discover whether the spawn of such fish has been affected.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* Radioactivity levels in Northern Ireland waters and in fish following the Chernobyl incident were low and have since declined to very low levels. These levels would have no impact on fish populations. The specific investigations referred to have not therefore been considered necessary.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigations have been carried out into the effect on *(a)* hares and rabbits, *(b)* red grouse, snipe pheasant and woodcock, *(c)* rooks and jackdaws, *(d)* grey crows, ravens, magpies and buzzards and *(e)* falcons and hawks, of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will indicate the amount of radioactivity present in the flesh of the various species as a result of that accident in those areas of Northern Ireland affected by that accident.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* Monitoring of the levels of radioactivity in wild species subsequent to the Chernobyl incident was discontinued when levels were found to be well below the control limit of 1,000 bq/kg.

Social Fund

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each year since the present system came into operation and the current year to date how many times the social fund commissioner has referred appeals back to the local office and in how many of such cases of referral in each year the local office refused to pay.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* The readily available information is as follows:

	Social Fund Review Applications		
	1988-89	*1989-90*	[2]*1990*
Cases referred back by Social Fund Inspectors to Social Fund Officers for redetermination	81	595	395
Cases in which no payment was made as a result of redetermination	[1]—	208	208

[1]Not available
[2]April-October

Loans and Grants

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each Department of Health and Social Services office in Northern Ireland what sums were available for *(a)* crisis loans, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* community care grants in each year since the system was introduced and the current year to the latest available date; how much was expended in each area in each year; and what was the percentage under or overspent in each area and year.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* The information is not available in the precise format requested as in the allocation of resources for loans from

the social fund no distinction is made between crisis and budgeting loans. Otherwise the details for each office are shown in the following tables:

Year ended 31 March 1989

Social Security Office	*Loans*			*Community care grants*		
	Budget	*Expenditure*	*Percentage (over)/under spend*	*Budget*	*Expenditure*	*Percentage (over)/under spend*
Andersonstown	905,619	835,186	7·78	471,353	441,620	6·31
Antrim	435,034	393,813	9·48	227,975	127,348	44·14
Armagh	322,985	256,080	20·72	170,219	91,105	46·48
Ballymena	379,364	328,289	13·47	199,742	70,666	64·63
Ballymoney	271,671	195,554	28·02	142,756	44,901	68·55
Ballynahinch	41,788	30,725	26·48	22,590	22,537	0·24
Banbridge	159,069	128,283	19·36	84,721	56,825	32·93
Bangor	177,038	165,034	6·78	94,874	80,094	15·58
Carrickfergus	165,336	158,956	3·86	87,156	46,653	46·48
Coleraine	428,571	334,107	22·05	224,795	103,022	54·17
Cookstown	260,206	231,603	11·00	136,787	133,318	2·54
Corporation Street	1,078,670	1,002,369	7·08	565,760	359,933	36·38
Downpatrick	164,193	155,620	5·25	86,599	44,425	48·70
Dungannon	405,542	346,935	14·48	213,702	130,350	39·01
Enniskillen	301,787	264,600	12·33	161,813	132,945	17·84
Falls	753,462	717,088	4·83	392,588	144,096	63·30
Holywood Road	489,148	448,035	8·41	258,404	209,835	18·80
Kilkeel	58,162	37,235	35·98	31,118	23,337	25·01
Knockbreda	253,421	243,974	3·73	137,060	131,105	4·35
Larne	163,604	163,595	0·01	85,372	43,962	48·51
Limavady	142,863	138,857	2·81	73,986	65,599	11·34
Lisburn	730,380	514,827	29·52	385,532	124,677	67·66
Londonderry	1,164,923	1,103,178	5·30	606,217	606,217	Nil
Lurgan	848,299	469,567	44·65	445,083	347,560	21·92
Magherafelt	435,749	227,776	47·73	229,896	218,354	5·02
Newcastle	76,819	63,520	17·32	40,816	19,783	51·53
Newry	697,358	441,005	36·76	366,163	179,437	51·00
Newtownabbey	273,545	267,913	2·06	143,538	47,940	66·60
Newtownards	142,875	138,180	3·29	76,297	59,471	22·06
Omagh	395,880	347,434	12·24	208,563	91,740	56·02
Portadown	209,130	206,933	1·05	111,211	111,201	0·09
Shaftesbury Square	584,247	455,628	22·02	305,219	151,991	50·21
Shankill	381,282	368,042	3·48	201,247	164,104	18·46
Strabane	402,120	376,556	6·36	210,940	109,666	48·01

Year ended 31 March 1990

Social security office	*Loans*			*Community care grants*		
	Budget	*Expenditure*	*Percentage (over)/under spend*	*Budget*	*Expenditure*	*Percentage (over)/under spend*
Andersonstown	932,410	932,409	—	442,394	442,384	—
Antrim	461,317	455,925	1·16	225,670	225,664	—
Armagh	318,737	318,735	—	169,258	168,686	0·33
Ballymena	385,109	352,864	8·38	197,790	186,791	5·56
Ballymoney	268,617	248,006	7·68	138,228	137,904	0·23
Ballynahinch	44,710	44,650	0·14	25,629	25,608	0·08
Banbridge	160,814	158,489	1·45	86,686	86,653	0·03
Bangor	187,166	183,394	2·02	94,295	90,095	4·45
Carrickfergus	171,258	169,961	0·76	94,626	93,085	1·62
Coleraine	427,065	415,569	2·69	225,561	225,560	—
Cookstown	257,932	226,143	12·33	147,724	147,683	0·02
Corporation Street	1,065,039	1,039,844	2·37	566,210	566,210	—
Downpatrick	168,476	162,151	3·76	87,131	87,126	—
Dungannon	406,060	387,119	4·67	218,442	218,534	(0·04)
Enniskillen	311,496	304,279	2·32	185,626	185,622	—
Falls	801,039	801,023	0·01	391,347	391,341	—
Holywood Road	522,199	517,724	0·85	274,270	270,605	1·33
Kilkeel	59,062	56,975	3·53	32,365	32,362	—
Knockbreda	283,005	282,139	0·30	156,027	156,068	(0·02)
Larne	170,264	170,307	(0·02)	86,575	85,355	1·40
Limavady	152,072	150,787	0·84	83,371	83,370	—
Lisburn	698,751	504,315	27·82	298,379	286,797	3·88
Londonderry	1,186,623	1,174,356	1·03	619,379	619,379	—
Lurgan	794,217	552,882	30·38	416,837	416,775	0·01
Magherafelt	413,409	337,665	18·32	241,428	241,427	—
Newcastle	78,413	69,357	11·54	41,673	41,570	0·24
Newry	679,813	679,785	0·01	383,001	382,994	—
Newtownabbey	296,905	296,884	0·01	143,676	143,602	0·05

Social security office	Loans Budget	Loans Expenditure	Loans Percentage (over)/under spend	Community care grants Budget	Community care grants Expenditure	Community care grants Percentage (over)/under spend
Newtownards	153,776	150,343	2·23	82,283	81,884	0·48
Omagh	394,289	366,896	6·94	196,030	185,720	5·25
Portadown	219,015	218,933	0·03	123,249	123,220	0·02
Shaftesbury Square	584,744	557,399	4·67	297,163	293,675	1·17
Shankill	397,224	397,545	(0·08)	209,008	209,008	—
Strabane	405,014	386,768	4·50	218,761	218,488	0·12

Current year to 31 October 1990

Social Security Office	Loans Budget	Loans Expenditure	Loans Per cent. spent year to date	Community care grants Budget	Community care grants Expenditure	Community care grants Per cent. spent year to date
Andersonstown	915,636	546,402	59·67	424,212	220,989	52·09
Antrim	448,499	252,974	56·40	229,953	118,573	51·56
Armagh	317,106	178,753	56·37	166,613	83,719	50·25
Ballymena	383,728	171,570	44·71	192,327	101,451	52·75
Ballymoney	265,554	157,798	59·42	136,757	61,184	44·74
Ballynahinch	48,703	26,075	53·54	29,384	16,897	57·50
Banbridge	162,037	98,793	60·97	92,455	52,810	57·12
Bangor	196,414	101,006	51·43	108,115	44,341	41·01
Carrickfergus	175,273	95,395	54·43	92,650	45,183	48·77
Coleraine	429,403	208,141	48·47	226,051	113,536	50·23
Cookstown	254,167	134,632	52·97	143,750	71,949	50·05
Corporation Street	1,059,369	607,133	57·31	601,174	350,683	58·33
Downpatrick	172,124	97,529	56·66	88,394	48,495	54·86
Dungannon	400,736	223,775	55·84	214,197	134,082	62·60
Enniskillen	327,961	211,835	64·59	194,388	137,324	70·64
Falls	799,911	486,250	60·79	387,353	223,462	57·69
Holywood Road	529,377	306,695	57·94	291,329	168,377	57·80
Kilkeel	61,022	33,713	55·25	34,267	14,034	40·95
Knockbreda	286,501	156,001	54·45	168,729	105,763	62·68
Larne	178,239	103,031	57·80	92,327	51,461	55·74
Limavady	162,347	81,359	50·11	84,517	45,695	54·07
Lisburn	652,879	261,125	40·00	339,746	170,752	50·26
Londonderry	1,204,827	707,300	58·71	650,955	368,909	56·67
Lurgan	730,837	309,606	42·36	400,229	226,086	56·49
Magherafelt	394,742	196,717	49·83	237,957	108,271	45·50
Newcastle	80,162	30,004	37·43	45,232	22,733	50·26
Newry	678,334	357,937	52·77	362,648	257,951	71·13
Newtownabbey	304,808	161,170	52·88	145,336	82,457	56·74
Newtownards	163,269	91,184	55·85	89,635	56,915	63·50
Omagh	394,944	233,628	59·15	199,907	110,044	55·05
Portadown	221,537	123,855	55·91	121,907	64,759	53·12
Shaftesbury Square	586,871	313,012	53·34	294,472	167,657	56·93
Shankill	403,126	198,728	49·30	214,459	107,092	49·94
Strabane	409,558	202,904	49·54	218,574	126,559	57·90

HOME DEPARTMENT

Broadcasting

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek a meeting with the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the shadow ITC to discuss the case for assurances from British Satellite Broadcasting, British Sky Broadcasting and News International about the expeditious honouring of contractual commitments of British Satellite Broadcasting to its customers, manufacturers and retailers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It would not be right for Ministers to become involved in contractual issues of this kind which must be for the parties concerned to pursue direct with the new company.

Police Firearms

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many operations firearms were issued to police officers in England and Wales for the years 1983 to the present; in how many of those operations shots were fired by police officers; how many police officers are currently qualified to carry firearms; and what were the equivalent figures for each of the previous seven years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information relating to the police use of firearms in operations against criminals or others known or believed to be armed is given in the following table.

Year	Number of authorised firearms officers	Number of operations	Number of occasions when shots fired
1983	13,044	3,180	3
1984	11,873	2,667	6
1985	10,244	2,488	7
1986	8,395	2,453	1

Year	Number of authorised firearms officers	Number of operations	Number of occasions when shots fired
1987	7,349	2,185	7
1988	7,194	2,227	2
1989	7,311	2,583	4

Despite a small increase in 1989, the trend over the period shows a significant reduction in the number of authorised firearms officers. The decrease reflects the emphasis placed by chief officers on having highly trained firearms officers in numbers no greater than is operationally necessary.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Department follows the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality, or fitness for purpose and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government agreement (GPA) where appropriate, my Department is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with the prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on the grounds of nationality.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as compared with the Government's supply index.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Information on my Department's best and worst purchases made in the current month as compared with the Governments supply index is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail price index in the last financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Gross running costs expenditure on Home Office administration was 10.3 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

Political Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names and salaries of each political adviser working in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Mr. Tony Kerpel. It is not the practice to disclose the salaries of special advisers as they are negotiated individually in relation to previous outside earnings and are therefore confidential.

Derbyshire Constabulary

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the report of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary on Derbyshire constabulary.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The report has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Distress Warrants

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 22 November 1990 *Official Report*, column *175*, on distress warrants, if he will classify by type the numbers of distress warrants issued in each of the last three years; and how many of these led to property seizure and sale.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 3 December 1990]:* Information on the number of distress warrants is obtained from the magistrates courts' management information system, and the only breakdown available is as follows:

Distress warrants issued in respect of arrears on:

	Fine and Fee accounts	Maintenance accounts
1987	185,000	200
1988	560,000	600
1989	587,000	2,800

Information is not available on the action occurring after the issue of a warrant.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government plan to make available further humanitarian assistance to Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: I very much welcome the agreement of all parties in Angola to the United Nations special relief programme. I have this week approved a further £500,000 of relief assistance for the victims of drought and civil war in Angola. This is in addition to our earlier agreement to help meet the cost of a team of United Nations relief co-ordinators and brings the total of our relief assistance to Angola to £1·5 million since September last year.

NATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Inflation

14. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to start publishing the rate of inflation excluding mortgage interest rates and the poll tax in the retail prices index press release.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. Data for the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments and the community charge are available upon request from the Central Statistical Office press office.

19. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current level of inflation; and what are the predictions for the next 12 months.

Mr. Maples: The all-items retail prices index inflation rate was 10·9 per cent. in October. The autumn statement forecast is for a sharp fall to 5½ per cent. by the fourth quarter of next year.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average rate of inflation from 1979 to the latest convenient date; and what was the comparable figure for the preceding five years.

Mr. Maples: Between October 1979 and October 1990, the latest available date, the retail prices index increased by an average of 7·3 per cent. per annum. The corresponding average annual increase between October 1974 and October 1979 was 15·8 per cent.

Inflation (European Community Countries)

15. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many countries in the European Community have a higher rate of inflation than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maples: Two.

Privatisation

16. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total gross costs to the Exchequer associated with the privatisation programme have been to date.

Mr. Norman Lamont: £1 billion has been paid in fees and other costs to privatisation advisers and contractors.

Interest Rates

17. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry on the current level of interest rates.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend has seen the CBI's latest economic situation report.

22. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Bank base rates are 14 per cent.

Departmental (Expenditure)

18. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Departments are planned to have less money in real terms in 1993-94 than they spent in 1990-91 on estimated outturns.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 1A.10 of the 1990 autumn statement.

Taxes and National Insurance

20. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of gross income paid in total taxation including national insurance by a married couple with one earner and two children on average wages and treating child benefit as negative income tax in 1978-79 and 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Approximately 35 per cent. and 36 per cent. respectively. Over the same period, measured at 1990 prices, the same family has enjoyed an increase in real net income of over £58 per week, compared with a rise of less than £1·40 under the last Labour Government.

25. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of non-oil gross domestic product non-oil taxes and national insurance contributions represented in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1989-90.

Mr. Maples: In 1978-79 it was 34¾ per cent. and 37¼ per cent. in 1989-90.

Child Benefit

21. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the Trades Union Congress to discuss child benefit.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have not met representatives of the Trades Union Congress to discuss child benefit.

Growth Forecast

23. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry about his forecast for growth in 1991.

Mr. Mellor: None, but I have seen the Confederation of British Industry's latest economic situation report.

Charities

24. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the future status of charities with regard to liability for value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My ministerial colleagues and I receive numerous representations about the future VAT position of charities. We make it clear in reply that we are committed to securing the right conditions for charitable activity to flourish, both now and in the single market after 1992.

Public Spending

26. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry about the public spending total for 1992-93.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend receives representations from the Confederation of British Industry from time to time on a variety of economic matters, but none has specifically addressed the public spending total for 1992-93.

European Central Bank

27. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to the report of the EC committee of central bank governors concerning a European central bank.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As the hon. Member knows, the work of the central bank governors was to establish what the arrangements might be if Governments decide that there should be such a bank. The Governor of the Bank of England has placed clearly on record the fundamental

reservations of the United Kingdom authorities—that is, the Government and the bank—about a single currency and a single monetary authority.

Income Tax

28. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the percentage of personal income taken by income tax in 1979 and 1990.

Mr. Maples: The percentage of personal income taken by income tax has fallen from 20 per cent. in 1978-79 to 17 per cent. in 1990-91.

Oil Prices

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the implications for monetary and budgetary policy of the increase in oil prices caused by the continuing crisis in the Gulf.

Mr. Mellor: Tight monetary and fiscal policies are required to ensure that the effect of higher oil prices on inflation is not accommodated.

Business Expansion Scheme (Housing)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost to the Exchequer of each unit of accommodation under the business expansion scheme for housing.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The cost per unit of accommodation of BES tax relief on residential property in 1988-89 is provisionally estimated as about £20,000. Information for 1989-90 is not yet available.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 December 1990

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the results of research on the demographic and economic impacts of AIDS in developing countries are now available; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Administration is funding two research projects on this topic, both based in Africa. They are "Analysis of the Demographic and Economic Impact of Aids in the Developing World" by Professor R. M. Anderson of Imperial College and "Community Coping Mechanisms in the face of exceptional Demographic Change" by Dr. Barnett and Professor Blaikie of university of East Anglia with Dr. Obbo. The results are expected to be published during 1991, but may not be conclusive.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Meals

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students attending colleges of further education, in each year since 1985, were in receipt of free school meals until they reached their 18th birthday, and were subsequently required to pay for school meals; and if he will take measures to ensure that all students, who otherwise qualify for free school meals, will not be disqualified on grounds of age.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of students in receipt of free school meals for the years 1985 to 1989 was as follows:

	Number
1985	1,300
1986	1,507
1987	1,958
1988	1,150
1989	1,026

Information is not held about the number of such students who re-enrolled in the institutions in the following years and were required to pay for their meals. There are no plans to change the existing arrangements which give parity of treatment with pupils attending secondary schools.

Disabled People

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of *(a)* physically disabled and *(b)* mentally disabled people living in Northern Ireland in each year since 1985.

Mr. Hanley: The information available is given in the table. It should be noted that until 1987 information on the numbers of physically disabled, mentally handicapped and mentally ill people known to, or in contact with, the health and social services boards was collected on a calendar year basis. Since 1988-89 the information has been collected on a financial year basis and is restricted to include only persons in contact with the health and social services board during that year.

Year	*Physically disabled*	*Mentally handicapped*	*Mentally ill*
1985	37,895	6,630	5,038
1986	38,593	6,610	4,890
1987	40,498	6,783	5,143
1988-89	25,811	6,651	6,690

The figures for 1989-90 have not yet been submitted by the health boards.

Benefit Recipients

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals giving their normal occupation as farming, are receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* unemployment benefit at each district office of the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Although precise figures are not available, it is estimated there are about 1,000 people getting family credit whose normal occupation is farming. Information about the number of such individuals receiving income support is not available and information about the numbers receiving unemployment benefit could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of people, over the age of 65 years, living in Northern Ireland in each year since 1985.

Mr. Hanley: The information, taken from the mid-year estimates of population, is as follows:

	Numbers
1985	186,800
1986	188,500
1987	190,900
1988	192,300
1989	194,000

Figures for 1990 will not be available until mid-1991.

Home Help

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals received home help care in each health board area in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 December 1990]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

	1986	*1987*	*1988-89*
Eastern Board	[1]13,866	[2]13,358	15,432
Northern Board	5,577	5,271	4,723
Southern Board	5,822	6,251	6,221
Western Board	4,632	4,615	4,497
NI Totals	29,897	29,495	30,873

[1] Includes estimated number for 1 Unit of Management.
[2] Includes estimated number for 3 Units of Management.

Data for 1986 and 1987 refer to recipients during year ended 31 December. Data for 1988-89 show recipients at 31 March apart from four (of the nine) units of management in the Eastern board which gave data for the calendar year 1988. Data for 1989-90 have not yet been submitted by the health boards.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Conservative Candidate, Cheltenham

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to prosecute Mr. Bill Galbraith of Cheltenham for comments he has made concerning the adoption of Mr. John Taylor as prospective Conservative candidate for Cheltenham; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Gloucestershire constabulary is conducting an investigation arising out of statements allegedly made by Mr. Galbraith. A report will in due course be submitted to the Crown prosecution service, which will consider whether to invite me to consent to the institution of proceedings for an offence under part III of the Public Order Act 1986.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

British Geological Survey

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *374*, if he will make a statement on the use to which the British Geological Survey's study of rock formation in England and Wales will be put.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The results of the systematic geological surveys of the United Kingdom carried out by the British Geological Survey are published in the form of geological maps, descriptive memoirs and reports. These have a wide range of applications including land use planning, mineral and groundwater resource assessment, engineering and geotechnical investigations and academic research.

Zidovudine

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will update the information given in the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on 15 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *832*, and if he will make a further statement on the progress of the Medical Research Council/INSERM trial of Zidovudine.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Medical Research Council/INSERM trial of Zidovudine is continuing. The number of participants enrolled to date is 831 in the United Kingdom and 803 in France.

Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he will take to implement the recommendations of the National Curriculum Council regarding the position of physical education and sport in the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the National Curriculum Council's advice on the curriculum for 14 to 16-year-old pupils. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 20 November 1990 at column *65*.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the Government's total expenditure on sport for each of the last five years and as a total over the same period; and what measures he will take to increase Government assistance to sport over the next years.

Mr. Atkins: In England central Government's total expenditure or planned provision on sport through grant in aid to the Sports Council and the Department of the Environment's urban programme for the years 1985-86 to 1993-94 is:

	Sports Council Grant	*Urban Programme*
1985-86 outturn	30·1	24·7
1986-87 outturn	37·4	21·3
1987-88 outturn	37·1	25·2
1988-89 outturn	39·0	17·8
1989-90 outturn	41·9	15·5
1990-91 estimated outturn	43·7	15·7
1991-92 plans	46·7	15·9
1992-93 plans	47·4	16·0
1993-94 plans	48·8	16·1

The Government also fund sport indirectly through other inner-city programmes and agencies and provide financial support for local authorities' revenue expenditure on sport through unhypothecated revenue support grant. In the light of recent departmental changes, I am considering what further steps may be taken to improve sport in schools.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will re-examine the allocation of teachers' hours in relation to extra-curricular activities in sport and recreation.

Mr. Eggar: The allocation of teachers' directed time is a matter for head teachers to decide.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will initiate a full assessment of the needs of physical education and training colleges, with particular reference to teacher training in team sports and other sporting skills.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to initiate such an assessment. As far as the content of initial teacher training is concerned, the Government's revised criteria for the approval of courses, announced in DES circular 24/89, require training institutions to prepare students to teach PE according to the requirements of the national curriculum.

English (Second Language)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many school students are estimated to have English as their second language.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not held centrally.

Teacher Appraisal

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent consultations on school teacher appraisal.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I hope to make an announcement shortly, details of which will be placed in the Library at the earliest opportunity.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Space

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any estimate of the amount of office space taken up by filing cabinets and cupboards in hon. Members' offices.

Mr. MacGregor: No. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information Technology

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) what assistance is available to hon. Members to move towards paperless offices;

(2) what studies his office have carried out into the potential of compact disc technology to reduce paper use and the need for storage space in hon. Members' offices.

Mr. MacGregor: Assistance for Members who wish to establish computer and other information technology facilities in their offices is available in two forms. Advice on suitable equipment and procedures can be obtained from the computer officer. Advice on funding the cost of equipment from the office costs allowance is available from the Fees Office.

The Services Committee's fourth report of last Session suggests ways in which information technology services in the House might be developed and funded.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Maude: The ECOFIN Council met in Brussels on 3 December. The Minister for Corporate Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom.

Further progress was made in discussions of the investment services directive and the money laundering directive was also discussed. These directives will both return to the Council for further consideration on 17 December.

Over lunch there was a brief discussion of organisational issues in preparation for the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union. The possibility of additional assistance for the countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was also raised. This will be discussed further at a special meeting of ECOFIN to be held on 10 December.

The arrangements for VAT controls after 1992 were also discussed and I explained that our consultations with industry were not yet complete. The Council heard statements from Germany and the Commission on the fiscal aspects of road transport.

There was a short discussion of a Commission paper concerning the debt of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries accrued under previous Lomé conventions. It was agreed that this should be considered further by ECOFIN in the new year.

The Council also discussed a further report from the presidency on negotiations with the European Parliament about revisions to the financial perspective arising from German unification and the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest informal meeting of the European Community's economic and finance ministers.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Economic and Finance Ministers and central bank governors of the European Community met informally in Milan on 2 December. The Governor of the Bank of England and I represented the United Kingdom.

The meeting began with a discussion of the state of the world economy and the possible need for additional assistance for the countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The chairman of the Committee of Central Bank Governors presented the committee's draft statutes for a European system of central banks, which will be published shortly. I repeated our reserve on the imposition of a single currency and a European central bank. I emphasised, however, our hope and expectation that an agreement on economic and monetary union would be reached which would be acceptable to all members of the Community.

There was also a short discussion of the economic situation in Greece.

Treasury Accountants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many accountants in the Treasury received pay increases in excess of 25 per cent. in the pay settlement years 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990, taken individually.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are no instances of accountants in the Treasury receiving increases in excess of 25 per cent. in respect of any of the pay settlement years 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Transaction Costs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methods are available to reduce transaction costs short of a single currency.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Transaction costs are most effectively reduced through increased competition, co-operation between banks in developing systems of making payments and technological change.

US Banking Crisis

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effects for the British financial system of the banking crisis and the collapse of the savings and loans companies of the United States of America.

Mr. Maples: The Government and the Bank of England have been closely following developments in the banking and savings and loan industries in the United States. The United Kingdom banking system is well capitalised and comprehensively regulated, and the US problems, particularly of the savings and loans, are the result of circumstances peculiar to the US which have no direct equivalent here.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what ethnic monitoring his Department has carried out concerning value added tax raids.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs and Excise does not carry out VAT raids; it instigates investigations into VAT frauds. No monitoring of ethnic involvement is made in these investigations; each case is treated on its merits.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many value added tax raids have resulted in *(a)* arrests and *(b)* convictions in the last five years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As stated, Customs does not carry out VAT raids. In the last five years investigations into VAT fraud resulted in *(a)* 348 arrests, *(b)* 1,070 convictions, and *(c)* 1,243 cases in which proceedings were compounded on payment of a penalty.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons are employed by the value added tax section engaged in raids on factories and offices.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs does not employ officers for specific types of VAT evasion. Its specialist VAT investigators undertake investigations of all types of VAT fraud.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many value added tax raids there have been in 1990, 1989, 1988, 1987 and 1986.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Again, Customs does not carry out VAT raids. The number of visits made in connection with VAT investigations where a search warrant was authorised are: 1986—figures not available, 1987—287, 1988—274, 1989—146, 1990—162.

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the Government's total income from *(a)* the football bettings duty and *(b)* the football industry as a whole for each of the past 11 years and as a total over the same period.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Receipts from pool betting duty are as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	136·1
1980-81	157·0
1981-82	176·0
1982-83	199·3
1983-84	204·9
1984-85	217·9
1985-86	235·2
1986-87	254·2
1987-88	277·0
1988-89	278·9
1989-90	303·8
	2,440·3

Information about the total Exchequer income from the football industry is not available.

Sporting Activities (Income)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the Government's total income from sporting activities for each of the past five years and as a total over the same period.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that this information is not available.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish tales showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The Treasury has not acquired any new buildings.

(b) In view of (a), nil return.

(c)

[1]*1988-89*	*1989-90*	[2]*1990-91*
£532,000	£371,000	£301,000

These figures are for part II and part III services delegated to Departments under property repayment services rules.

(d)

[1]*1988-89*	*1989-90*	[2]*1990-91*
£1,211,000	£500,000	£200,000

[1] Figures for previous years for the whole of the Treasury could not be obtained except at disproportionate costs.

[2] Forecast figures.

These figures are for building renovation part I services for which the Treasury has paid from its departmental budget.

Monetary Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies have been initiated by Her Majesty's Government or by the European Community of the tangible benefits to be derived from monetary union over those expected from the completion of the single market.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* The European Commission published in October 1990 a report entitled, "One market, one money: an evaluation of the costs and benefits of forming an economic and monetary union". The Government tabled an explanatory memorandum on the report on 5 November 1990. The autumn 1990 edition of the Treasury bulletin set out the Government's proposals for the establishment of a European Monetary Fund to manage a new common currency, the "hard ecu". These measures would be a powerful force for inflation convergence at the best Community performance.

TRANSPORT

Ship Registration

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what talks he is planning to have with the General Council of British Shipping to discuss the trend in the tonnage of the ships registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend met the president of the General Council of British Shipping on 4 December, when a number of shipping issues were discussed.

London Underground

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will call for a report as to how many trains were cancelled through Oxford Circus on the night of 4 December;

(2) how many London Underground trains were cancelled on the night of 4 December.

Mr. Freeman: These are operational matters for London Underground Ltd.

Relief Road, Manchester

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the public consultation to take place, in respect of the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Chope: Spring 1991.

Transport Expenditure, Scotland

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase transport expenditure in Scotland in the areas of responsibility under his Department.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* Over the next three years BR plans to spend over £30 million in 1990-91 prices on infrastructure in Scotland. Scotland will also benefit from other BR investment in both infrastructure and rolling stock. In addition, the Department will issue credit approvals for £1 million for Scottish local authority ports in 1991-92.

HEALTH

NHS (Theft and Fraud)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of reported cases of theft and fraud in *(a)* the national health service and *(b)* the Norwich health authority in each year since 1979 showing (i) the total number of cases reported, (ii) the number of cases reported to police, (iii) the number of prosecutions and (iv) the number of convictions in each year.

Mr. Dorrell: Table A provides information on the number of reported cases in the category of theft, fraud, arson, neglect of duty or gross carelessness as reported by Norwich health authority for the years since its inception in 1982, and corresponding data for all health authorities in England. No separate breakdown of fraud or theft is available.

Health authorities are required to report to the Department annually all instances of alleged fraud and data are shown in table B. Norwich health authority has made no reports of fraud since the authority's inception.

Information on the number of theft cases reported to the police, prosecutions and convictions are not collected centrally by the Department.

Table A

Reported cases of loss of cash, equipment and property in stores arising from theft, fraud, arson, neglect of duty or gross carelessness in health authorities in England

Year	Number of cases	
	Norwich health authority	All health authorities
1982-83	70	4,289
1983-84	85	4,181
1984-85	65	5,308
1985-86	76	5,199
1986-87	59	4,584
1987-88	37	3,840
1988-89	35	4,373
1989-90	33	4,028

Source: Annual Statement of Losses from Health Authorities for the relevant years.

Table B

Reported cases of fraud in health authorities in England

Year	Number of cases reported by health authorities		
	Reported to police	Prosecutions	Convictions
1982-83	1	1	0
1983-84	0	0	0
1984-85	6	6	6
1985-86	6	4	4
1986-87	8	7	7
1987-88	7	6	6
1988-89	5	3	3
1989-90	4	3	1

Incontinence

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people he estimates are in need of incontinence aids; how many of such people are accommodated in residential nursing homes in *(a)* the public and *(b)* the private sector; and how many and what percentage of such persons in each sector receive such incontinence pads free of charge.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about the demand for and supply of incontinence pads is not held centrally.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will issue guidance to all health authorities to provide incontinence pads to residents of homes for the elderly.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance has already been issued to district health authorities advising them, at their discretion, to provide incontinence pads to people in residential homes.

Rotherham Health Authority

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that resources are provided to meet the necessary costs of staff development within the area of the Rotherham health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The costs of staff development are met out of normal revenue funding for health authorities. It is a matter for Trent regional health authority to allocate resources to district health authorities in that region.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Rent Arrears

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the 10 local authorities with the highest arrears as a percentage of the rent roll at the end of 1989-90;

(2) what is the actual or estimated total figure for arrears of rent outstanding to all local authorities for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Yeo: Figures for the position at the end of 1989-90 are not yet available.

An ordered table, showing cumulative rent arrears at March 1989 as a percentage of the rent roll for each English local authority, was placed in the Library on 3 April. Estimated total arrears for all English local authorities at the end of 1988-89 were £319 million.

Waste Management

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who has primary responsibility for specifying the requirements for waste management practices at incinerator plant.

Mr. Trippier: Currently operations at incinerators are governed by the conditions of site licences granted by waste disposal authorities under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution also has responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for the control of air pollution from all chemical incinerators, and other incinerators with capacities of over 1 tonne per hour; this control covers the whole process, including such matters as good housekeeping and training of operators. Local authority environmental health departments are responsible for the control of air emissions from other types of incinerator, under the Clean Air Acts and the statutory nuisance provisions of the Public Health Acts.

When the new system of integrated pollution control is brought into effect under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will assume full responsibility for the control of all releases to the environment, whether to air, water or land, from incinerators with a capacity of over 1 tonne per hour. Air emissions from other incinerators will be controlled by local authorities at district level; waste regulation authorities will have responsibility for all other aspects of control. Regulations detailing the interface will be laid shortly.

Air Pollution

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action local authorities are able to take to control air pollution from mobile plant; and if he will list all authorisations granted for mobile plant under the Environmental Protection Act, by local authority granting the authorisation and the contractor's principal place of business.

Mr. Trippier: Under part I of the Environmental Protection Act, the powers available to control air pollution from processes prescribed for local authority control will be the same whether the process is fixed or mobile. Mobile processes will require an authorisation; the conditions included in such authorisations must secure the objectives specified in section 7(2) of the Act, including the use of BATNEEC to prevent or minimise emissions of prescribed substances.

Part I of the Act will be brought into force from 1 April 1991. No authorisations have yet been granted.

Environment Newsletter

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his departmental library subscribes to the fortnightly newsletter, "Environment Business".

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 *(a)* the amount of moneys paid to local authorities from the European regional development fund and *(b)* the amount which is taken into account under the additionality principle for basic credit approval purposes showing the totals for each local authority concerned and the programmes being financed.

Mr. Portillo: *(a)* Information on the amount of moneys paid to individual local authorities from the European regional development fund could be provided only at disproportionate cost and *(b)* EC grants enhance the national total available for distribution as credit approvals. In general that total is distributed to individual local authorities as basic credit approvals on the basis of their overall spending needs, without regard to whether expenditure is to be supported by EC grants. There is a limited exception for expenditure in the other services block where expected EC receipts are taken into account in distributing supplementary credit approvals.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legislation, including statutory instruments, regarding the operation of the poll tax in 1991-92 has still to come before the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the estimated annual radiation dose equivalent uptakes in milliSieverts per annum by members of the public living near Bradwell and Dungeness nuclear power stations, arising from all sources of radiation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Doses to small groups of persons living close to the sites resulting from discharges to atmosphere of the radionuclide argon 41 are up to about 0·1 milliSieverts per annum. Doses from discharges via other environmental pathways are reported from time to time by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, copies of whose reports are placed in the Library of the House.

Commonhold

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made any assessment of the number of properties that would be eligible for inclusion in a new tenure of commonhold.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* No. The Building Societies Association estimates that there are up to 3,000,000 owners of leasehold flats who could be affected by commonhold legislation. We are unable to confirm that estimate, but comparison with the 1981 census count of leasehold householders suggests that it is on the high side.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* Information about the number, and levels of remuneration, of people appointed to public bodies by my Department is given in the annual HMSO publication "Public Bodies". A copy of the current issue is held at the House of Commons Library and "Public Bodies 1990" will be published shortly. Information about reimbursements, such as travel and subsistence expenses, is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

The Gulf

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister what urgent steps he has taken in order to assess the *(a)* economic, *(b)* financial and *(c)* humane costs of an armed conflict of Arab, British and American troops with Iraq; and what information Her Majesty's Government are gathering about the economic, social and political impact of such conflict upon non-oil producer countries in the third world and those in the middle east in particular.

The Prime Minister: We are doing everything in our power to contribute to a peaceful solution to the Gulf crisis based on the full implementation of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council. It is not possible to make exact predictions of the effects of hostilities in the manner suggested, should it be necessary to use force to eject Saddam Hussein.

Latin America

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister what support her Majesty's Government are giving to the call of Finance and Economy Ministers of Latin America to start negotiations with the European Community for a free trade accord.

The Prime Minister: No formal request for this purpose has been received by the Community. If one were, it would be carefully considered. The Government would play a full part in that process.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received concerning compensation for nuclear test veterans.

The Prime Minister: I have not, as far as I am aware, received any representations from nuclear test veterans. The Ministry of Defence has, however, received about 120 claims from individuals seeking compensation for damage to health allegedly due to participation in the United Kingdom's nuclear weapon test programme. In addition, a number of representations have been made by test veterans' organisations concerning compensation for their members.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to visit India.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to visit India.

Mr. John Hall

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his answer on 4 December concerning the case of Mr. John Hall, *Official Report*, column 172 if he will agree to meet Mr. Hall to discuss compensation.

The Prime Minister: I understand that Mr. Hall is in receipt of a war pension. He has made no claim for compensation other than this. Should Mr. Hall pursue a claim for compensation, Government officials would be happy to discuss the matter with him.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Strategic Mineral Stockpile

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement as to what makes up the constituents, and what is the purpose, of the strategic mineral stockpile.

Mr. Leigh: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to his question about the contents of the strategic mineral stockpile on 16 November, at column *236*. The stockpile was established originally as a contingency against short-term disruptions to certain industrial supplies.

Environment Newsletter

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his departmental library subscribes to the fortnightly newsletter, "Environment Business".

Mr. Leigh: Yes: The library and information service of the Department of Trade and Industry does subscribe to "Environment Business".

Legal Proceedings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will state the nature of any legal proceedings under way, outstanding or stayed by a judge in the High Court which have been brought by his Department against either British Aerospace or Rover.

Mr. Lilley: On 10 September, HMG served writs on Rover Group and British Aerospace to secure the repayment with interest of, respectively, £1·5 million and £42·9 million which had been ruled by the Commission to be unauthorised concessions in connection with the sale of Rover Group to British Aerospace. On 29 November British Aerospace and Rover Group made a successful application to the court for a stay in these proceedings pending the outcome of their application to the European Court of Justice to annul the Commission's requirement to repay.

Unit Trusts and Life Assurance

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decision he has reached on the report by the Director General of Fair Trading on the rules made by the Securities and Investments Board concerning disclosure of information relating to the sale of unit trusts and life assurance products.

Mr. Lilley: In April, the Director General of Fair Trading reported to my predecessor on SIB's disclosure rules, introduced during 1989, applying to the sale of unit trusts and life assurance products. The director general concluded that certain of SIB's rules are likely to restrict or distort competition to a significant extent. Under the Financial Services Act, I have to decide whether or not I agree with the director general and, if I do, whether or not the anti-competitive effect is greater than necessary for the protection of investors.

In view of the importance of this issue, my Department invited views from all interested parties to be sent to the Department by the end of September. I have taken account of these views in reaching my decision.

I have concluded that SIB's disclosure rules, as currently drafted, are likely to restrict or distort competition to a significant extent. My main reason is that I consider that the present rules do not automatically provide the investor with the information he needs, and at an early enough stage, to make an informed investment decision. It is especially difficult for an investor to make a comparison between a purchase through an independent financial adviser (IFA) and a purchase through a tied agent.

I have also concluded that the effect on competition is greater than necessary for the protection of investors.

However, I know from the responses received during the consultation period that there are very real concerns about the effects of any new rules that might replace the existing ones. I appreciate these concerns. I also agree with the director general and with SIB in attaching importance to the maintenance of a healthy IFA sector.

I am therefore asking SIB to propose changes to lessen the anti-competitive effect of the present rules but which take into account the desirability of:

- giving the consumer the comparable and timely information he needs in a form which is readily comprehensible;
- avoiding imposing unnecessarily burdensome costs on product providers; and
- ensuring that any changes to the rules on disclosure of commissions do not result in a distortion of competition between IFAs and tied agents.

These are very complex issues which will require further work and consultation. SIB has already indicated considerable identity of view with the director general and has committed itself, with the self-regulating organisations and other regulatory bodies, to an evolutionary approach to disclosure issues. I welcome this and the fact that SIB is already working, through its quality of information working party, to improve the information available, with a view to publishing proposals for comment by the summer of next year. I hope that SIB will pursue this work and introduce new measures within the next 18 months.

European Regional Development Fund Grants

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to discuss with local authorities the use of European regional development fund grants for industrial and regional development in the light of local authority budget constraints.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 November 1990]:* I have no specific plans for such a discussion although I regularly meet local authorities during the course of my regional visits.

British Steel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has made an assessment of the likely impact the completion of the single European market will have upon British Steel's ability to compete with European steel makers for orders in the North sea offshore sector.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* The Scottish Development Agency's study of the prospects for the steel industry in Scotland will consider all relevant factors. No purpose would be served by duplicating the agency's work.

Clydesdale Steel Works

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the chairman of British Steel plc to discuss the avenues he explored for the possible retention of steel making and seamless tube production at Clydesdale before deciding to close the works.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* My right hon. Friend met the chairman of British Steel on 7 September and has no plans for a further meeting at this stage.

Seamless Tubes

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between the Department for Trade and Industry and British Steel on the company's relationship with its competitors in the seamless tube market.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 November 1990]:* All discussions between British Steel and the Department on any subject are conducted on a confidential basis. I intend to respect that confidence.

Coalfield Areas (Funding)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of the scope, funding and operation of European Community funding for coalfield and former coalfield areas under the RECHAR programme, and of the work undertaken by his Department to assist with the operation and monitoring of

this programme, together with details of any restrictions that have been placed upon the abilities of local authorities to fund schemes which would otherwise have attracted grants under the RECHAR programme.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The European Commission's notice about the RECHAR initiative for Community assistance to coal-mining areas was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities of 27 January 1990. This set out, inter alia, the eligible measures and the criteria for the definition of eligible areas. The Commission's decisions as to eligible areas were published in the *Official Journal* of 18 July 1990. Eleven programmes of measures were submitted by the Government to the Commission on 26 July 1990 and are currently awaiting Commission approval. The Commission has indicated that the financial allocation to the United Kingdom areas will be 156·2 million ecu.

My Department, the Departments of the Environment and of Employment, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office, which are responsible for the applications, have consulted widely with local and other authorities in matters relating to the preparation, operation and monitoring of RECHAR programmes.

Both local authority and other schemes are eligible for RECHAR grant. Detailed allocations will depend on decisions by programme monitoring committees when the programmes have been approved. As it is not possible to say in advance which particular schemes will attract grant, the last part of the question does not arise.

WALES

Student Courses

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what numbers and what percentages of full-time students in further education and tertiary colleges in each county in Wales are studying the following types of courses *(a)* A and AS-levels, *(b)* BTEC (first and national diploma) and (c) GCSE.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information for 1989-90 is as follows:

	A and A/S levels		*BTEC First and National Diploma*		*GCSE*	
	Number	*Per cent*	*Number*	*Per cent*	*Number*	*Per cent*
Clwyd	451	13	1,528	45	251	7
Dyfed	50	2	1,337	51	40	2
Gwent	904	23	1,106	28	297	7
Gwynedd	69	4	782	48	—	—
Mid Glam	75	2	1,281	38	53	2
Powys	13	2	420	52	40	5
South Glam	349	13	819	30	322	12
West Glam	1,632	35	1,610	35	262	6
Wales	3,543	15	8,883	38	1,265	5

Numbers relate to full-time and sandwich students following the required courses at higher and further education and tertiary colleges. They are shown as a percentage of the total number of full-time and sandwich students on further education courses.

Welsh Language

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he plans to take as a result of the effects of the compulsory teaching of Welsh at secondary level upon the teaching of modern languages in those schools in non-native Welsh-speaking areas which have traditionally offered more than one modern language to GCSE level.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 1 November. Schools are free to offer pupils the choice of more than one modern foreign language in addition to Welsh.

Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will meet representatives of the youth services in Wales to discuss the development of the core curriculum.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I see no immediate need to do so. Our officials continue to be engaged in discussions with representatives of the youth service on the development of a core curriculum.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the standard indicators used by his Department to quantify the extent of alcohol abuse problems in any part of Wales and the figures against each such standard indicator for each county in Wales for each of the last five years for which figures are available, together with the percentage of the population which is represented by the figure against each such indicator.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Social problems resulting from alcohol misuse are diverse and varied and they are not possible to define in terms of standard indicators. However, details of death and discharges from national health service hospitals in Wales of patients with principal diagnosis relating to alcohol are shown in the table. Consideration is being given to methods of obtaining clearer indicators.

Deaths and discharges (in-patients and day cases) from national health service hospitals in Wales with principal diagnosis relating to alcohol
1984-88

	Clwyd	Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan	Total
1984									
A	513	198	263	125	252	45	279	215	1,890
B	20	10	40	47	64	0	151	61	393
TOTAL	533	208	303	172	316	45	430	276	2,283
1985									
A	579	185	253	147	286	45	317	216	2,028
B	29	38	56	44	73	1	127	33	401
TOTAL	608	223	309	191	359	46	444	249	2,429
1986									
A	510	208	287	158	277	50	325	215	2,030
B	28	28	67	44	71	0	93	34	365
TOTAL	538	236	354	202	348	50	418	249	2,395
1987									
A	509	291	349	175	314	53	328	223	2,242
B	39	26	63	74	93	1	84	47	427
TOTAL	548	317	412	249	407	54	412	270	2,669
1988									
A	524	267	306	225	287	55	356	224	2,244
B	31	24	62	65	49	0	107	54	392
TOTAL	555	291	368	290	336	55	463	278	2,636

Notes:
1. Note that the information given may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.
2. ICD 9 codes 291 (Alcoholic Psychoses), 303 (Alcohol Dependence Syndrome) 305.0 (Non dependant abuse of alcohol), 980 (Toxic effect of alcohol).
3. ICD 9 codes 571. 0-571·3 (Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis—related to alcohol) 535·3 (Alcoholic gastritis).

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Minister at the Welsh Office will take direct responsibility for discussions, communications and negotiations in regard to any application to establish a national health service trust in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Section 5 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 confers power on me to establish, by order, national health service trusts in Wales.

Care and Repair Agency Schemes

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the future funding of care and repair agency schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Following the success of an experimental scheme, we plan that the resources available for associated local agencies will be increased to £360,000. This is almost double the current level of funding and forms part of an agreed support package covering the next five years. In addition grant aid of above £105,000 is envisaged in order to establish a developmental unit specifically for care and repair in the Principality.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence and Rape

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of successful prosecutions for *(a)* cases of domestic violence, *(b)* rape by a person known to the victim and *(c)* rape by a person unknown to the victim for each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: Information on prosecutions and convictions is not collected centrally in sufficient detail to distinguish either domestic violence or whether an assailant is known to the victim in rape cases. Some information concerning rape cases is available from recent research studies in "Changes in rape offences and sentencing", Home Office research study 105 and "Concerns about rape", Home Office research study 106. Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Social Security Fraud

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are currently serving prison sentences for social security fraud; and if he will give these figures for the years 1970 to 1990, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: The available information given in the table relates to the number of persons sentenced to immediate custody each year for social security offences for 1970 to 1989. Data for 1990 are not yet available.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody for social security offences[1] by sex from 1970 to 1989
England and Wales

Year	Immediate custody Males	Females
1970	190	12
1971	143	7
1972	166	10
1973	134	7
1974	119	1
1975	167	5
1976	237	11
1977	300	24
1978	301	47
1979	372	44
1980	404	46
1981	335	50
1982	326	37
1983	245	26
1984	181	18
1985	170	16
1986	154	13
1987	139	22
1988	86	14
1989	61	11

[1] Until 1984, data includes offences under the National Insurance Acts.

Football Spectators

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all persons or organisations in Scotland with whom arrangements have been made by his Department with a view to enforcing the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Scotland) Order 1990; what form these arrangements have taken; and what further measures he intends to take to promote this order.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Article 3 of the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Scotland) Order 1990 specifies the Crown Office, Edinburgh, as the authority in Scotland that will certify the conviction of a person there of an offence specified in schedule 1 to the order. These arrangements are well known to the procurator fiscal. No further formal arrangements are required.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all persons or organisations in Italy with whom arrangements have been made by his Department with a view to enforcing the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Italy) Order 1990; what form these arrangements have taken; and what further measures he intends to take to promote this order.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Article 3 of the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Italy) Order 1990 specifies the Ministry of Grace and Justice as the authority in Italy that will certify the conviction of a person there of an offence specified in schedule 1 to the order. No further formal arrangements are required.

The standing committee of the European convention on spectator violence and misbehaviour at sports events urged member states, which include Italy, to act vigorously on the basis of article 5 of the convention in prosecuting hooligans at sports events.

I understand that the Ministry of Justice has reminded the Italian courts that confirmed convictions involving British nationals should be reported to it.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take in relation to persons convicted abroad of offences corresponding to those set out in schedule 1 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, but whose cases are subsequently subject to appeal proceedings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In accordance with section 22(4) of the 1989 Act a restriction order may not be made in relation to a person convicted in a country outside England and Wales of a "corresponding offence" if it appears that the conviction is the subject of proceedings in a court of law in that country questioning the conviction.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all persons or organisations in Sweden with whom arrangements have been made by his Department with a view to extending the measures outlined in the Football Spectators (Corresponding Offences in Italy) Order 1990, to cover offences committed in Sweden; what form these arrangements have taken; and what further steps he intends to take to extend these measures.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are in discussion with the Swedish authorities on this matter. No formal arrangements have been agreed as yet.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Crop Damage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *135*, if he will place the relevant research on damage to crops in the Library.

Mr. Maclean: I will place the information in the Library as soon as possible.

Eggs

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the value of eggs (i) imported into the United Kingdom and (ii) exported from the United Kingdom in each month since September 1989.

Mr. Curry: The number and value of shell eggs (i) imported into the United Kingdom and (ii) exported from the United Kingdom from September 1989 up to and including October 1990 (latest available figures) are set out in the table:

	'000 Eggs	Value £
Imports		
1989		
September	58,044	2,532,210
October	38,285	1,513,155
November	74,354	3,401,470
December	53,882	2,643,422
1990		
January	37,755	1,670,107
February	34,982	1,520,792
March	66,290	3,226,961
April	54,212	2,187,086
May	76,115	3,053,742
June	72,839	2,730,381
July	52,608	1,992,012
August	65,622	2,568,045

	'000 Eggs	Value £
September	52,964	2,424,870
October	50,136	2,024,978
Total	788,088	33,489,231
Exports		
1989		
September	8,861	332,546
October	9,874	374,294
November	5,507	277,352
December	5,889	315,224
1990		
January	9,580	539,652
February	7,662	349,428
March	6,347	320,290
April	6,660	329,901
May	7,231	338,151
June	6,353	288,356
July	12,767	609,872
August	13,640	474,317
September	9,353	336,649
October	9,180	352,955
Total	118,904	5,238,987

Global Warming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply of 16 November, *Official Report*, column *250*, whether the Agriculture Council meeting on 27 November discussed the relationship between European agricultural practices and global warming.

Mr. Curry: This topic was not on the agenda for this Council and was not discussed.

Rabies

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are now being taken to prevent the spread of rabies to the United Kingdom from the European continent following recent developments in the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Eurotunnel has implemented agreed measures to prevent the possible entry of rabies-susceptible animals while the tunnel is being built. These include fencing, staged security zones, visual observation at openings in fencing and a system to ensure that any animals which are seen in the tunnel are reported.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish measured and estimated annual radiation dose equivalent uptakes in milliSieverts per annum by members of the general public living near Bradwell and Dungeness nuclear power stations arising directly from radiation in the local environment and from consumption of land produce; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Information on radiation doses to the general public from radio activity in the marine and coastal environment and from consumption of locally produced foodstuffs around Bradwell and Dungeness power stations is published annually by this Department in the "Terrestrial Radioactivity Monitoring Report: Radioactivity in Food and Agricultural Products in England and Wales" and "Aquatic Environment Monitoring Report: Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles". The latest copies of both reports are in the Library of the House.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pesticide products remain to be reviewed; and how long he expects this work to take.

Mr. Maclean: This extensive list of information was announced on 1 November and is available in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Jack: The Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement (GPA) where appropriate, the Department is obliged to award contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Personal Pensions

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer, during financial year 1991-92, of the 2 per cent. incentive payment paid from the national insurance fund to people with personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: On the assumption that by the end of 1990-91 the number of people with personal pensions is 4·5 million, the Government Actuary estimates that the revenue foregone by the national insurance fund in respect of the 2 per cent. incentive will be £600 million in 1991-92.

Direct Payment of Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to make clear to staff and claimants that the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 allows for benefit administered clerically to be paid directly into the bank account or building society belonging to a claimant, their spouse or other person acting on the claimant's behalf.

Miss Widdecombe: I am arranging for guidance to be issued to local social security offices clarifying the help and advice they can give to individual beneficiaries who have no suitable person to act on their behalf and who request payment direct to bank or building society accounts. The facility is already available for bulk payments of benefit to agents and appointees handling the affairs of customers.

Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to announce details of the disability employment credit scheme; and on what basis the level of credit will be determined.

Mr. Scott: "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" (Cmd. 917) set out the basic structure of the proposed disability employment credit, which, in the light of research and discussion, has now been renamed disability working allowance. A number of responses were received from organisations and individuals which were helpful in working up the provisions relating to disability working allowance set out in the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill.

A note giving more detailed information about the benefit, including elements which we propose to set out in regulations in due course, was published on 12 November 1990 and a copy was placed in the Library. This note included illustrative rates of benefit but the level at which the benefit would be introduced in April 1992 will not be settled until nearer the time.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to amend the payment rates of severe disablement allowance to take into account *(a)* those who do not have sufficient national insurance contributions, *(b)* those who have never worked and *(c)* women who have not worked outside the home for a number of years.

Mr. Scott: I have no plans to do so. Severe disablement allowance is already paid to people in these circumstances. From this month age-related additions have been introduced to SDA which focus most help on those who become disabled early in life.

Pensioners

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the extra weekly amount married and single pensioners would now receive if the earnings link had not been broken.

Miss Widdecombe: The full-rate, basic retirement pension, if it had been uprated since 1979 by the higher of prices or earnings, would today be £58·65 per week. For a married couple where the wife is receiving a pension based on her husband's contributions, the combined amount payable would be £94·05. The extra amounts received would therefore be £11·75 and £18·95 respectively. This would cost national insurance contributors an extra £5·5 billion in 1990-91. What really matters to pensioners is their total income from all sources; this rose on average by 31 per cent. between 1979 and 1987.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will list, for each member state of the European Community, the rate of weekly state retirement pension for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the 1989 edition of the Department's publication, "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the European Communities", a copy of which is in the Library. These tables set out the levels of pension in the national currencies together with the sterling equivalent converted according to the purchasing power parity figures as shown in the introduction to the tables.

Computer Centre, Swindon

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the computer centre at Oak house, Swindon, became operational; and if he will make a statement on the progress of implementing the Department's new computer systems.

Mr. Jack: I am pleased to be able to announce that Oak house, Swindon, started processing income support and pensions payments on 3 December. This additional processing centre, run by Sema Ltd. under the direction of the Information Technology Services Agency, will enable the implementation of the operational strategy in local offices to be completed by the middle of next year. A total of 387 local offices have now been connected and 75 per cent. of new income support claims are being processed by computer, thus giving better service to the public, improved job satisfaction to the staff and savings in administration.

DEFENCE

Dockyards (Radiation)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum total radiation dose recorded for any Chatham dockyard worker registered in the defence radiological protection services' record-keeping system; over what period it accrued; and what are the 20 highest doses recorded.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The maximum lifetime total radiation dose for a Chatham worker currently registered in the DRPS's record-keeping system is 511·6 milliSieverts. This total dose was accrued over the period 1 January 1968 to 5 December 1983.

The 20 highest doses recorded for workers so registered are shown in the table:

Highest Radiation Doses/Chatham Dockyard

Cumulative dose (mSv)
511·60
420·21
403·13
396·99
393·58
387·46
366·57
365·44
352·88
348·27
340·57
325·06
320·74
307·87
307·43
304·86
298·44
297·05
295·45
288·07

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give a breakdown for Rosyth dockyard of annual individual radiation exposure for Rolls-Royce personnel in the bands of *(a)* nought to 10, *(b)* 10 to 20, *(c)* 20 to 30, *(d)* 30 to 40, *(e)* greater than 50, *(f)* greater than 70 and *(g)* greater than 100 milliSieverts for each year since 1979;

(2) if he will give a breakdown for Devonport dockyard of annual individual radiation exposure for Rolls-Royce

personnel in the bands of *(a)* nought to 10, *(b)* 10 to 20, *(c)* 20 to 30, *(d)* 30 to 40, *(e)* greater than 50, *(f)* greater than 70 and *(g)* greater than 100 milliSieverts for each year since 1979;

(3) if he will give a breakdown for Chatham dockyard of annual individual radiation exposure for Rolls-Royce personnel in the bands of *(a)* nought to 10, *(b)* 10 to 20, *(c)* 20 to 30, *(d)* 30 to 40, *(e)* greater than 50, *(f)* greater than 70 and *(g)* greater than 100 milliSieverts for each year since 1979;

(4) if he will give a breakdown for the Clyde submarine base at Faslane of annual individual radiation exposure for Rolls-Royce personnel in the bands of *(a)* nought to 10, *(b)* 10 to 20, *(c)* 20 to 30, *(d)* 30 to 40, *(e)* greater than 50, *(f)* greater than 70 and *(g)* greater than 100 milliSieverts for each year since 1979;

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested by the hon. Member is a matter for Rolls-Royce and associates.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the distribution of total radiation exposure for Chatham dockyard workers in the ranges *(a)* nought to five milliSieverts, *(b)* five to 10, *(c)* 10 to 15, *(d)* 15 to 20, *(e)* 20 to 25, *(f)* 25 to 30, *(g)* 30 to 35, *(h)* 35 to 40, *(i)* 40 to 45, *(j)* 45 to 50, *(k)* greater than 50, *(l)* greater than 100, *(m)* greater than 200, *(n)* greater than 300, *(o)* greater than 400, *(p)* greater than 500, *(q)* greater than 600, *(r)* greater than 700 and *(s)* greater than 750 milliSieverts, in numbers and in terms of percentage of the overall work force.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A breakdown of cumulative radiation exposure for workers registered in DRPS's record-keeping system as working at Chatham dockyard, including those who have left MOD but whose last MOD establishment was Chatham, is shown in the table:

Dose range	*Number of persons*	*Percentage of work force monitored*
0–5	80	16·7
5–10	36	7·5
10–15	30	6·3
15–20	22	4·6
20–25	23	4·8
25–30	15	3·1
30–35	13	2·7
35–40	13	2·7
40–45	16	3·3
45–50	12	2·5
Greater than 50 (50–100)	83	17·3
100 (100–200)	83	17·3
200 (200–300)	38	7·9
300 (300–400)	13	2·7
400 (400–500)	2	0·4
500 (500–600)	1	0·2
600 (600–700)	0	0
700 (700–750)	0	0
750	0	0

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the collective commitment made by the United Kingdom, along with the United States of America and Soviet Union, at the first United Nations special session on disarmament in 1978 to negative security assurances and the renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states, remains the policy of Her Majesty's armed forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government are well aware of their responsibilities and undertakings as set out in their negative security assurance to the United Nations.

Military Doctrine

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions his officials have discussed military doctrine with their Soviet counterparts in the last two years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been a number of defence exchanges between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union in the last two years, during which a wide range of matters have been discussed, including military doctrine. There was also a military doctrine seminar in Vienna from 16 January to 5 February this year, in which both British and Soviet representatives took part.

Conventional Forces

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the inclusion of maritime confidence-building measures in the further discussions on conventional force reductions in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The mandate for the conventional forces in Europe follow-on talks (CFE1A) specifically excludes naval issues.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether those British tanks that will be removed as part of the conventional forces in Europe agreement will be sold or destroyed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The CFE treaty provides for reductions in tank holdings required by the treaty to be by destruction or conversion to certain forms of non-military use. The possibility exists of transferring excess equipment to allies provided national limits on equipment holdings are not exceeded. No final decision on the manner of United Kingdom tank reductions has yet been taken.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects his programme of inspections of nuclear-powered submarines to be completed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The programme of inspections of our nuclear-powered submarines is continuing and will be completed as soon as possible.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to publish a declassified summary of the results of his inspections of the Royal Navy's in-service nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. It is not our general practice to comment on the material state of individual nuclear-powered submarines.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which groups of service personnel are monitored for levels of radiation exposure.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Groups monitored for exposure to ionising radiation include: nuclear submarine operating, maintenance and training personnel; radiographers employed in hospitals, non-destructive testing units, clearance diving teams, explosives ordnance disposal units and in general medical, dental and nuclear medicine units; users of high-voltage equipment (which may emit X-rays) such as radar operators and security personnel; health physicists; personnel involved in handling and maintaining nuclear weapons; personnel employed in NBC training, and personnel employed as instrument calibration technicians and storekeepers.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records relating to service personnel are held on the national register of radiation workers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The national register of radiation workers keep records of annual and cumulative lifetime doses on all service personnel who have been dosimeter wearers at any time since 1978 with the exception of those who have requested to opt out of the scheme.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inspections have been made by radiological protection advisers of nuclear-powered submarines in each year for the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not the function of a radiation protection adviser (RPA) to carry out inspections, but rather, as required by the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985, regulation 10(1), to advise the employer.

SCOTLAND

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to Greater Glasgow health board in advertising and assessing competitive tenders for its medical records and secretarial services; and what was the outcome.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Advertising and assessment costs were approximately £5,000. The board is currently considering how to obtain the best quality service and value for money in the future.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been allocated by Greater Glasgow health board to the Glasgow North county medical team for the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

	Salaries £	*Supplies* £
1989-90	151,000	6,000
1990-91 (projection)	224,000	10,500
1991-92 (at current prices)	224,000	[1]16,000

[1] This includes resources for additional equipment.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the proposed start and completion dates for the Seafield units to be built by Greater Glasgow health board to house patients from Lennox Castle.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The first unit is sited at Rodger drive, Rutherglen. Building commenced in October 1990 and will finish in October 1991.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what capital projects are to be cut from Greater Glasgow health board's programme following the reduction in the capital investment grant.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Capital allocations to individual health boards for 1991-92 have still to be decided.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long the Glasgow county medical team will be in the temporary accommodation at Waverley Park school.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The team has been using this accommodation as an administrative base since the week commencing 29 October 1990, when it was relocated from Maryhill health centre. The current accommodation provides more space, is functionally acceptable, and will be used until longer-term accommodation is located.

AIDS

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the expenditure in Lothian region on patients with HIV for the years 1989-90; and what is the expected expenditure for 1990-91.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Lothian health board has estimated that its total expenditure on HIV and AIDS-related services was approximately £2,275,300 in 1988-89 and £2,621,700 in 1989-90. For 1990-91 the board anticipates total expenditure of around £6,158,200 on such services. The board cannot readily distinguish between expenditure on persons with HIV and on those with AIDS.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on HIV and drugs media campaigns for each of the years from 1984 to 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In Scotland health education at national level is the responsibility of the Scottish health education group. The following table gives details of expenditure incurred by the group on HIV/AIDS and drug misuse media advertising and related activities:

£000

	HIV/AIDS	*Drugs*
1984-85	—	285·0
1985-86	8·5	235·0
1986-87	86·6	286·2
1987-88	53·2	297·1
1988-89	46·9	206·5
1989-90	77·4	150·0
1990-91	[1]115·2	[1]68·0

[1] Provisional.

From 1988-89 the mass media campaign on drug misuse has been conducted on a Great Britain-wide basis, and the contributions made by the Scottish Home and Health Department towards the costs are shown in the following table:

	£000
1988-89	160
1989-90	200
1990-91	[1]300

[1] Provisional.

Nurses

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who will be the validating body for certification of nurses following the introduction of Project 2000; and who will be legally responsible for student work on the wards on their branch regime following its introduction.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland is currently in negotiation with a number of appropriate agencies about the validation of Project 2000 courses. Project 2000 students will not be health board employees but will be subject to the regulations of their college. They will work in wards under the direction and supervision of registered nurses.

Lanarkshire Health Board

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when representatives of Lanarkshire health board last met with Scottish Office officials; and what was discussed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Representatives of Lanarkshire health board last met with Scottish Office officials on 27 November to discuss the board's accountability review submission.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he intends to take to achieve quality control with the minimum of administration in training and enterprise councils and in training providers.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils agree with my Department a strategy for managing quality. This is an integral part of their corporate and business plans. These plans form the foundation of contractual arrangements between TECs and my Department. This quality strategy sets out the mechanisms the TEC will use to ensure improvements in value for money and relevance of their provision, and includes their arrangements to ensure the capability and efficiency of their training providers. I have taken steps to ensure that administrative procedures imposed upon TECs are kept to a minimum.

Mills (Denton and Reddish)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will list all mills in Denton and Reddish for which improvement notices have been issued by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of removing asbestos; when the notices were issued; how many have been complied with; and whether the Health and Safety Executive has satisfied itself that there is no possibility that asbestos remains a hazard in any mills in the Denton and Reddish constituency.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issued an improvement notice in respect of the removal of asbestos at Vernon mill, Stockport on 23 February 1990. The notice was not complied with by the due date and HSE successfully prosecuted the managing agents of the mill on 19 November 1990.

Asbestos will continue to present a potential hazard at the mill while remedial work is carried out to comply with the terms of HSE's improvement notice. This work is being monitored by HSE.

Although responsibility for ensuring that asbestos is not a hazard to those employed or to members of the public rests with the owner or occupier of premises, HSE is not aware of a potential hazard from asbestos in any other mills in the Denton and Reddish constituency for which HSE is the enforcing authority for health and safety legislation.

Client Advisers

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how long the new client advisers who interview the recently unemployed are recommended to spend with them.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Lighting Industry

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the Lighting Industry Federation about improvements in health and safety for workers at their workplaces in respect of lighting requirements.

Mr. Forth: I have had no such discussions.

Display Screens (Safety)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislation he intends to bring forward to enable the United Kingdom to meet the requirements of the European Community directive on the minimum safety and health requirements for work with display screen equipment.

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom has no existing legislation specifically on health and safety of workers using display screen equipment. The Health and Safety Commission is currently discussing with the CBI and the TUC the most appropriate way to implement the directive.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The information requested is as follows. It has not been possible to separate the expenditure between new buildings and renovations.

	1986-7	1987-8	1988-9	1989-90	1990-1
No new buildings	5	9	18	73	131
Spend on new buildings and renovation (£ million)	7·549	8·891	17·041	14·409	34·745
Spend on repair and maintenance (£ million)	4·144	4·338	7·310	7·321	17·238

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list showing for full-time male and female manual and non-manual workers respectively the two and three-digit SIC industries in which the percentage increase in weekly earnings, including overtime and excluding absence, was *(a)* less and *(b)* more than the rate of inflation in the year to April 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The available information on percentage increases in average gross weekly earnings in the year to April 1990, at 2 and 3 digit standard industrial classification (SIC) level, is published in part C of the 1990 new earnings survey report. Information on the percentage increase in the retail prices index (all items) in the year to April 1990 is published in table 6.5 of the latest *Employment Gazette*. Copies of the publications are in the Library.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will arrange for a copy of the Health and Safety Executive's most recent study of the channel tunnel project, conducted by the accident fire prevention advisory unit, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Forth: It is not HSE's policy to make reports by its accident prevention advisory unit (APAU) available, as they rely on information provided in confidence by employers.

THE ARTS

Arts Expenditure

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Minister for the Arts what has been the Government's total expenditure on the arts for each of the past five years and as a total over the same period.

Mr. Renton: Total central Government expenditure on the arts for each of the past five years has been as follows:

	£ million
1986-87	343·3
1987-88	368·3
1988-89	413·9
1989-90	446·3
1990-91	494·2
	2,066·0

Arts Funding (Reforms)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received on the structural reforms of arts funding from Nottinghamshire county council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Nottinghamshire county council wrote to my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), on 24 October expressing its reservations about his proposals of 24 September to further strengthen the new regional arts boards.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any new plans to encourage Brazil and Argentina to sign the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty following the bilateral accord signed between the two countries on nuclear controls, at Foz de Iguau on 28 November.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is our policy to take every suitable opportunity to raise non-proliferation issues, and the non-proliferation treaty in particular, with states that are not parties to the treaty.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for nuclear non-proliferation policy of the Foz de Iguau agreement signed between the Presidents of Argentina and Brazil on 28 November.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regard this statement as a positive step, although we are seeking clarification of some aspects.

We will continue our efforts to secure universal adherence to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to achieve acceptance by all non-nuclear weapons states of full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, and to ensure that national and multilateral nuclear export controls are appropriately devised and effectively implemented.

Football Spectators

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of criminal proceedings currently in progress in Italy involving alleged offences by citizens of England and Wales which correspond to the offences contained in schedule 1 of the Football Spectators Act 1989; when is the likely date of completion of each of these proceedings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We understand that 36 England supporters were convicted during the 1990 world cup in Italy. Another eight were released pending trial and a further 23 detained did not have their arrests confirmed and were released. Under bilateral arrangements, the Italian Ministry of Justice informs the British police of any convictions involving such offences; it does this after the legal processes have been completed and any appeals heard. No cases have yet been notified.

The Italian authorities have been asked to provide the likely date of completion of proceedings in each of these cases, and I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Military Forces, Soviet Union

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any request to the Soviet military authorities for information concerning recent developments in military forces east of the Urals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has asked his Soviet opposite number for assurances regarding their intention with regard to treaty limited equipment withdrawn east of the Urals. The Soviet Union has responded with partial information. We and our allies will continue to press for a full account and to monitor the situation carefully.

Confidence-building Measures

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what difficulties have so far been encountered in the implementation of the confidence-building measures agreement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Implementation of the 1986 Stockholm document on confidence and security-building measures has generally been a success. It is particularly encouraging that the challenge on-site inspection regime has become a routine and regular part of its implementation.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will introduce a single agreed national scale for the energy efficiency rating of *(a)* domestic dwellings and *(b)* commercial and industrial premises.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are two commercially available energy labelling schemes for the housing sector both based on the Building Research Establishment's domestic energy model (BREDEM). My Energy Efficiency Office (EEO) in co-operation with the Department of the Environment and the Building Research Establishment (BRE) is working with the National Energy Foundation and MVM-Starpoint, the two organisations providing energy labelling services, to find an acceptable means of making a reliable and simple comparison between the two rating systems.

So far as commercial and industrial buildings are concerned, there is no established labelling scheme at present. The EEO is in touch with developments at BRE and elsewhere and will keep the need for Government involvement under review.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), *Official Report*, 15 November, column *192*, he will set out those areas of detail in regard to the proposed reprocessing contracts to which reference is made, which his Department will require in order to fulfil international nuclear safeguards commitments.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All material received by AEA Dounreay is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement.

Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report, "A Field Guide on the Reduction and Disposal of Waste From Oil Refineries and Market Installations", prepared by Concawe, the organisation of European oil companies for environmental protection.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department regularly receives reports from Concawe and a copy of the report in question is already in the departmental library.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish measured and estimated annual radiation dose equivalent uptakes in milliSieverts per annum by members of the public living near Bradwell and Dungeness nuclear power stations arising directly from radiation emitted from the structures of the power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: The external radiation doses to members of the public living near the nuclear power stations at Bradwell and Dungeness are assessed by measurements taken routinely by the operator and published in annual reports. The most recent annual figures are for 1989, which show a maximum external dose at these stations of 0·3 mSv for the year.

The measurements do not discriminate between external radiation arising from structures and from radiation associated with discharges. The dose assessment represents the total external dose to the most exposed local residents due to these stations.

These doses are more than 10 times lower than the statutory United Kingdom dose limit and are less than one third of the principal dose limit of 1 mSv currently recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP).

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 December 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General what action he intends to take in order to improve facilities for immigration appeals in Leeds; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department is actively considering increasing the number of hearing rooms available at Coronet house, Leeds for hearing immigration appeals, and a survey will shortly be undertaken with a view to improving the ventilation facilities there. The Lord Chancellor's Department is also keeping under review facilities and staffing levels at all hearing centres in light of the increasing number of appeals.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General if he will define the period of delay which is regarded as acceptable before immigration appeal hearings are heard; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: It is impractical to identify any particular period as more or less acceptable because of the widely differing nature of individual appeals, appellants and their representatives. For example, in appeals from persons abroad, their representatives in the United Kingdom may need considerable time to obtain instructions from the appellants.

The Lord Chancellor's Department, however, seeks to keep waiting times for hearings to the minimum that the procedural rules, volume of business and available resources permit.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of hearing rooms, adjudicators and support staff available in order to process immigration appeals; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The number of hearing rooms, adjudicators and support staff are being kept under constant review by the Lord Chancellor's Department in light of the rising volume of immigration appeals. In 1989, additional resources were made available to the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) which resulted in a 50 per cent. increase in the number of cases disposed of. The figures requested were as follows on 1 December 1990:

Adjudicators
1 Chief Adjudicator
11 Full-time Adjudicators
70 Part-Time Adjudicators
23½ Hearing Rooms[1]

Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT)
1 President
2 Vice-Presidents
2 Part-Time Chairmen
2 Hearing Rooms[2]

Support Staff for Adjudicators and IAT
85 The IAA has been authorised to increase this figure to 96½, and the additional staff should be in post in early 1991.

[1] Adjudicators are permanently based at Thanet House in London, Harmondsworth, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds but also hear appeals periodically at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast.
[2] At Thanet House in London.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General if he will quantify the ratio of immigration appeal personnel to immigration appeal cases on an annual basis for the last three years for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is set out in the table.

	A *Cases received by adjudicators*	*B* *Applications received for leave to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal*	*C*[1] *Average number of staff in post at the Immigration Appellate Authorities*	$\frac{A + B}{C}$
1987	9,735	1,256	77	142·7
1988	14,365	2,211	79	209·8
1989	18,707	3,143	81	269·8
1990[2]	19,653	2,836	85	264·6

[1] Excluding Judicial Personnel.
[2] January to October 1990.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General by whom the judges who will hear the appeal of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings will be selected.

The Attorney-General: The allocation of judges to the Court of Appeal criminal division is the responsibility of the Lord Chief Justice. The allocation of individual cases to those judges is the responsibility of the registrar of criminal appeals and his staff, subject to and in accordance with any directions given by the court.

The Birmingham Six appeals will be heard by Lord Justice Lloyd, Lord Justice Mustill and Lord Justice Farquharson.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if discussions have taken place between the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Lord Chief Justice regarding the management of the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The Attorney-General: Any discussions which the Director of Public Prosecutions might have with the judiciary in his official capacity would be confidential and would not be disclosed.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Football Matches

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding policing costs for football matches.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received representations from the Football League, ACPO and the local authority associations as well as from right hon. and hon. Members on the terms of a proposed Home Office circular. The draft circular advises police authorities to recover as far as practicable the full cost of providing police officers inside football grounds.

We are now considering the comments received.

Fire Brigade Employees

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any conveniently available figures for the number of employees of fire brigades who have left to take up positions in the middle east.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not held centrally.

Suicide

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the apparent suicide of Edwin Robinson in Brixton, he will now publish the report of Judge Tumim on Brixton prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: We hope to do so shortly.

Women Prisoners

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are in prison for *(a)* theft and handling stolen goods and *(b)* fraud and forgery; and if he will provide a breakdown of the categories they fall into.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest readily available information is given in the table.

Female sentenced prisoners[1] in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 June 1990: by offence

Offence	*Number[2]*
Theft of motor vehicle	—
Taking and driving away	1
Other thefts	161
Handling stolen goods	49
Frauds	44
Forgery	6
Other known offences	843
Offence not recorded	149
All offences	1,253

[1]Including those committed in default of payment of a fine.
[2]Provisional figures.

Wounding

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders convicted of grievous wounding have committed the same offence after serving a prison sentence for the first conviction on that offence since 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Information is not available in the form requested. However, it has been estimated that of some 5,800 adult males discharged in 1986 from serving a prison sentence for a conviction of violence against the person, some 2,520 (44 per cent.) were reconvicted of a standard list offence within two years of release; for some 670 the first such conviction was for an offence of violence against the person: that is, approximately 12 per cent. of the 5,800. More information on the reconvictions of persons released from prison service establishments can be found in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales", a copy of which is in the Library.

Prisoners

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the length of time *(a)* the longest serving prisoner currently on remand and *(b)* the longest currently serving convicted prisoner has served.

Mrs. Rumbold: According to the records held centrally, which are approximate, the latest readily available information is as follows.

The longest period a person had been held in custody on 30 September 1990 awaiting or during his trial was just over two years and seven months. The trial was completed on 1 November.

On 30 September 1990 the longest continuous period spent in prison service custody under sentence by a serving prisoner was just over 38 years and two months. One other serving prisoner who had been recalled following an earlier release on life sentence licence had spent a total of almost 40 years and 10 months in prison service establishments under sentence.

Domestic Servants

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his review of the arrangements for the admission to the United Kingdom of domestic servants accompanying their employer makes special reference to Kuwait; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The conclusions of the review which were announced in another place by my noble Friend Lord Ferrers on 24 July at columns 1449-50 apply regardless of nationality to arrangements for overseas domestic servants to be admitted to the United Kingdom to continue working for an employer who comes here. Any application to enter or remain in the United Kingdom made as a result of the invasion of Kuwait will be carefully and sympathetically considered.

Isle of Wight Prisons

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the timetable for a scheme to use locally manufactured refuse-derived fuel for a combined heat and power scheme for Isle of Wight prison complexes at Camphill, Albany and Parkhurst; and if he will make it his policy to promote the rapid conclusion of such a scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I understand that the Isle of Wight council is in negotiation with one of the electricity supply companies to construct a power station on the island capable of consuming the total output of refuse-derived fuels produced on the island.

The Home Office study into using such fuel for its prisons on the island has therefore been suspended.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on promoting the use of recycled materials and renewable energies where relevant to his Department's activities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Department is investigating the use of refuse-derived fuel (RDF). At the present time one prison is utilising RDF as a replacement for coal on a long-term trial and three other prisons are being looked at to see if they are suitable to undertake similar trials.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is proposing to take to ensure that the prison service reaps the maximum financial and environmental benefits from combined heat and power schemes and that such schemes are given priority.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Department is currently appraising combined heat and power schemes but no decisions have yet been taken to install them in any of our establishments.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects and centres to which his Department has contributed financially in respect of research into alcohol misuse, with the figure for each such project or centre in the present financial year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the past three years the Home Office has commissioned or carried out the following projects:

- A survey of drinking in England and Wales, conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys;
- The Newport alcohol abuse and social disorder demonstration project;
- An evaluation of the effects of experimental byelaws to control public drinking in the central parts of various towns and cities, conducted by the Home Office crime prevention unit;
- An assessment of the role of economic models in understanding the links between alcohol and crime, conducted by the university of York centre for health economics; and
- A study of drinking and disorder in non-metropolitan areas, carried out by the Home Office research and planning unit.

In the current financial year the Home Office has spent £15,000 on research into alcohol misuse.

Data Protection

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the use of data for computer matching to create personal computer profiles for commercial and mailing purposes.

Mrs. Rumbold: We will carefully consider any recommendation the Data Protection Registrar may make when his consideration of the issue of computer matching is complete.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to increase the funding of the office of the Data Protection Registrar; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have agreed a 1991-92 increase of 8·6 per cent. in cash terms on the previous year. Funding will continue to be determined in the light of expenditure bids and overall public spending constraints.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the retention of data concerning acquittals on police computer records.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The recording of data on police force computers is a matter for individual chief officers. They are guided by the code of practice for police computer systems which has been prepared by the Association of Chief Police Officers. A copy of the code is in the Library. Prosecution information is not retained on the police national computer in the event of an acquittal.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there are any United Kingdom Government or European Community proposals to extend data protection legislation to manual files; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government have no present plans to extend data protection legislation to manual files. The draft directive on data protection, issued by the Commission of the European Communities on 13 September, covers structured collections of manual data. Negotiations on the draft are expected to start next year.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were initiated by the Data Protection Registrar in *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1988, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* 1990 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The figures, collected by reference to the time when cases were brought to court, are as follows:

	Number
1987	1
1988	4
1989	19
[1]1990	17

[1] To date.

Most of the prosecutions were for failure to register. Good practice in the handling of data is enforced primarily through discussions with data users or their representative bodies, supported where necessary by enforcement notices.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has made within the European Community concerning the issuing of a directive on data protection; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: None as yet. The Government are consulting United Kingdom organisations with an interest

in data protection and will take their views into account in negotiations on the draft directive. We expect these to start next year.

Charities

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals for the reform of the law affecting charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government's proposals are set out in the White Paper, "Charities: A Framework for the Future", which was presented to Parliament on 16 May 1989.

Personal Advisers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many personal advisers Ministers of his Department have; if he will list them by name, showing the date of appointment, salary bands and areas of responsibility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: One special adviser, Mr. Tony Kerpel, is employed in the Home Office. He was appointed with effect from 3 December 1990. He will provide advice on a wide range of Home Office subjects.

It is not the practice to disclose the salaries of individual advisers as they are negotiated individually in relation to previous outside earnings and are therefore confidential.

Durham Prison

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action he is taking following the criticism of the prison authorities made by Mr. Justice Potts in connection with the murder in Durham prison of 19-year-old Darren Brook; and whether such action will seek to establish responsibility for what happened and seek to prevent its recurrence;

(2) if he will call for a report on the circumstances in which Darren Brook was confined in a cell at Durham prison with a long-term prisoner, having been sentenced to a period of custody in a young offenders' institution; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A full investigation was carried out into the circumstances of Mr. Brook's tragic death as a matter of urgency by the governor at Durham prison in January of this year. This led to the implementation of revised and improved procedures on the young offender wing. The trial judge, Mr. Justice Potts, has expressed satisfaction at the steps taken at the prison to avoid a similar occurrence and I am similarly satisfied. A fellow young offender has recently been convicted of Mr. Brook's murder.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the analysis of returns from justices' clerks regarding the number of poll tax liability orders made by magistrates courts is now available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The analysis of returns from justices' clerks is not complete but responses are available from 89 per cent. of justices ' clerks. These show that by the end of September liability orders had been made against 344,307 people. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Overseas Electors

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the ministerial and departmental visits made overseas in 1990 in connection with the promotion of the changes in the rights of overseas electors; what, in each case, was the cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Neither Home Office Ministers nor officials made visits overseas as part of the publicity arrangements for the extension of the overseas franchise under the Representation of the People Act 1989.

Police Complaints Procedure

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report on the location of exhibits requested by Paul Malone, a constituent of Liverpool, Broadgreen, to allow him to proceed with action against certain police officers and on the reasons why they have not been released to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that Mr. Malone has recently obtained summonses against three officers of the Cheshire constabulary. The supply of police documents to the courts is a matter for the chief officer of police.

Carriers' Liabilities Act

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums have been paid by each airline consequent upon the Immigration (Carriers' Liabilities) Act 1987 and by way of penalty for carrying non-visa holders from visa countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not the practice to disclose information on the record of individual airlines under the Act. The total amount incurred by all carriers (that is, airlines and sea operators) to mid-November 1990 was £22·792 million, of which £8·135 million had been paid; liabilities had been waived in respect of £1·142 million, leaving £13·515 million outstanding.

Separate information on the payments relating to the carriage of visa nationals without valid visas is not available.

TRANSPORT

Rear Lights

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to limit the number and intensity of permitted red lights in car rear windows.

Mr. Chope: I have no plans to limit the number of red lights that may be fitted at the rear of cars or to introduce additional limits for intensity except that additional stop lamps fitted in rear windows on new cars sold after 1 April 1991 will be limited to half the intensity of standard stop lamps.

Buses

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effective measures are available to promote the use of buses, as referred to in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A variety of traffic management measures including with flow and contra-flow bus lanes, priority at traffic signals, exemptions from prohibited turns, bus stop clearways, and other types of waiting and loading restrictions are available to give buses an advantage over other traffic.

My Department is examining current practice with a view to issuing further guidance for the benefit of local authorities, bus operators, and enforcement agencies.

Rail Freight

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of grant aid or subsidy was provided to rail freight for each year between 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's freight business has a commercial remit, and has received no Government grant aid or subsidy in these years apart from its share of level crossings grant under EC regulation 1192/69. Other bodies can receive grants towards the cost of rail freight facilities under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 if a switch from road freight to rail produces worthwhile environmental benefits at a reasonable cost. Since 1979 the Government have awarded 136 section 8 grants totalling £53 million, removing over 25 million tonnes of freight a year from the roads.

Bypasses

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what guidance is given by his Department to local authorities in assessing the need to construct bypasses;

(2) what provision he has made in the estimate of spending need for the next financial year of the Cheshire county council for capital expenditure upon road construction; what is the comparable figure in real and cash terms for the current financial year; and what consideration he gave in setting these figures to the need to construct the Wheelock bypass.

Mr. Chope: Transport supplementary grant and credit approvals for capital expenditure on local roads are allocated in the light of information presented in the annual transport policies and programme submissions from the 108 local highway authorities in England. The allocations for 1991-92 will be announced shortly.

Cheshire county council's latest submission shows that the main works on the Wheelock bypass are not due to start until 1993-94 and that the authority plans to spend only £55,000 on its design and other preliminary expenses in 1991-92.

Motor Cars

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is considering to penalise the promotion of motor car manufacture and sales based on power, speed and acceleration as against efficiency, safety and fuel economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have discussed with repesentatives of the Advertising Standards Authority how to encourage car manufacturers to place less emphasis on speed in their advertising. The Advertising Standards Authority has recently required the withdrawal of several advertisements.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reduction of carbon dioxide emissions is achieved by the use of lead-free petrol when measured against leaded petrol; and if he will quantify this reduction per annum.

Mr. Chope: Using unleaded rather than leaded fuel results in a small reduction of fuel efficiency and therefore increased emissions of carbon dioxide. The use of unleaded fuel helps to reduce emissions of lead from vehicles into the air and is essential to the operation of catalytic converters which reduce emissions of other pollutants. The Government will continue to promote the widespread use of unleaded fuel which now accounts for almost 40 per cent. of petrol sales.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what would be the resultant reduction in pollutants emitted by car exhausts if a zero growth in domestic vehicles was achieved against projections of growth in these vehicles over the next decade.

Mr. Chope: Total emissions depend on the amount of traffic and the rate of emissions per vehicle. Assuming that three-way catalysts are fitted to new cars from the end of 1992, and taking the mid-point between the Department's high and low traffic demand growth forecasts, emissions of carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and hydrocarbons from cars are expected to decline by over half between 1991 and 2000.

If the average fuel efficiency of cars remains constant over the same period and the same mid-point traffic demand forecast is used, we would expect carbon dioxide emissions from cars to grow by about 30 per cent. However, there is considerable scope for fuel efficiency improvement in this sector and it is not possible at this stage to make any useful estimate of what the actual change in carbon dioxide emissions might be.

Speed Limits, Essex

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects a decision to be taken on Essex county council's highway committee's application of October 1988 to extend the 30 mph and 40 mph speed limit zones in Danbury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* A decision in principle will be sent to Essex county council before the end of this month.

Subject to the completion of the necessary statutory procedures, the Secretary of State could confirm an order early in 1991.

WALES

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the projects and centres to which his Department has contributed financially in respect of research into alcohol misuse, with the figure for each such project or centre in the present financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Wednesday 5 December 1990, c. *150*.

Additionally some funding from the Department for generic activity has been applied to work related to alcohol misuse.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish any circulars and draft guidance issued by his Department in pursuance of the announcement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at his Department on Drinkwise day of finance for projects to tackle alcohol abuse.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The relevant circulars, WHC(90)78 and WHC(90)79, were issued on 5 December 1990. Copies of these are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets he expects to be met as a result of the provision for alcohol abuse, as announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at his Department on Drinkwise day.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Short-term targets will be sent when allocations are made, taking into account what health and local authorities consider can be achieved by their proposed projects. These will contribute towards achieving the long-term aim set by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in the health for all strategy. Examples of good practice will be circulated.

Disabled People

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of disabled people employed in his Department; and what is the target quota.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department employs 29 people who are registered disabled; they represent 1·3 per cent. of all staff. The target quota is 3 per cent.

Student Courses

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what numbers and what percentages of full-time students over the age of 16 years in each county in Wales are studying in *(a)* further education and tertiary colleges and *(b)* maintained 11 to 18 years schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information for 1989-90 is as follows:

The numbers and percentages of full-time students over 16 years of age

	Further education and tertiary colleges[1]		*Maintained secondary schools*[2] *11-18*		*Other*[3]		
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Total students*
Clwyd	1,632	53	1,040	34	420	14	3,092
Dyfed	1,215	47	1,388	53	—	—	2,603
Gwent	1,849	61	1,106	37	63	2	3,018
Gwynedd	837	52	773	48	—	—	1,610
Mid Glamorgan	1,549	48	1,651	52	—	—	3,200
Powys	354	49	374	51	—	—	728
South Glamorgan	1,156	43	1,278	48	233	9	2,667
West Glamorgan	2,210	76	682	24	—	—	2,892
Wales	10,802	55	8,292	42	716	4	19,810

[1]Full time and sandwich students on further education courses at higher and further education and tertiary colleges. Aged 17 and 18 at 31 August 1989.
[2]Aged 17, 18 and a small number of 19 year olds (that is, 60) as at 31 August 1989.
[3]6th form colleges in Clwyd and South Glamorgan and senior comprehensive school (14-18) in Gwent.

Hospital Treatment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the health authorities on the computation of appropriate charges for cross-border flows of patients for hospital treatment *(a)* inside and outside Wales and *(b)* across health authority boundaries within Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. National health service service providers both inside and outside Wales will be expected to price their services on the basis of what it costs to provide them; and charges will accordingly vary as between providers. Information systems are being improved to facilitate more accurate and detailed costing of services in the future.

Ewe Premium

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in paying the second instalment of the ewe premium scheme to Welsh sheep producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The second advance payment has, in fact, been brought forward and has already been issued to 95 per cent. of the 17,700 claimants. The first and second advances together will have benefited farmers' cash flow by around £25 million.

National Library of Wales

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, columns 4-5, if he will place a copy of the staff inspection report into the national library of Wales, Aberystwyth in the Library.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is not the Department's practice to place copies of staff inspection reports in the Library of the House.

South Glamorgan Health Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority regarding the level of baseline budget for the next financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions to date; but he will be meeting the chairmen of all district health authorities in Wales early in the new year to discuss allocations for 1991-92.

Land Use, Glamorgan

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the areas of unused or underused land in Glamorgan; and in respect of what proportion of that land there are no firm proposals for development.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available. However, land registers have been published, and are available for inspection at both the Department's Cardiff office and each district authority's main office, showing unused or underused land held by the public sector in the districts of Cardiff, Lliw Valley, Ogwr, Rhymney Valley, Swansea, Taff Ely, and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Programme for the Valleys

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans for the future of the programme for the valleys; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have announced my intentions for the future of the programme for the valleys today. They are set out in the documents "The Valleys: Partnership with the People". I have sent a copy to each right hon. and hon. Member whose constituency falls within the valleys programme area and have also placed copies in the Library of the House.

Gipsy Sites

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all authorised gipsy sites in Wales, indicating when they were established, together with the ordnance survey grid reference number for each site.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is given in the following table.

	Date established	*OS grid reference*
Official local authority sites		
Morfa, Llanelli	1962	SS 52000/98400
Kingsmoor Common, Kilgetty	1968	SN 1200/0680
Cwmcrachan, Nantyglo	1969	SO 195/112
Under the Hills, Haverfordwest	1974	SM 94300/14300
Upper Race, Pontypool	1975	SO 276/000
Withybush, Haverfordwest	1976	SM 95800/19600
Catshole Quarry, Pembroke	1978	SM 985/029
Llandegai, Bangor	1980	SH 593/713
Withybeds, Welshpool	1981	SJ 235/070
Glynmil, Merthyr Tydfil	1982	SO 059/049
Waterloo, Pembroke	1982	SM 980/035
Shirenewton, Cardiff	1984	ST 323/179
Rover Way, Cardiff	1985	ST 321/176
Ruthin Road, Wrexham	1986	SJ 310/504
Pantyblawd Road, Morriston	1988	SN 6762/9825
Briton Ferry	1989	SS 7347/9368
Private sites		
Clwyd		
Milfords, Tyn Y Morfa	Information not available	
Dee Bank, Bagillt	Information not available	
Dyfed		
Thorhill Road, Cwmgwili	Information not available	
Pontrhydybishwell, Lotwen Road, Cwmgwili	Information not available	
Gwynedd		
Bethesda	Information not available	
Mid Glamorgan		
Pandy Road Caravan Park, Bedwas	Information not available	

Note: This information is provided by the local planning authorities in Wales.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Sudanese Refugees

28. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what discussions he has had with British representatives of organisations working with Sudanese Christian refugees as to possible financial assistance for their work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: None, because the Commissioners' funds are not by law available for such purposes. The primary duty of the Commissioners is the support of the full-time parochial ministry of the Church of England, in service and retirement, and the bulk of their income is used for that purpose.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Balance of Payments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what increase in gross domestic product, real disposable incomes and consumer expenditure in each of the years 1985 to 1990 would have been compatible in terms of the Treasury economic model with a continuing balance of payments surplus on current account; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table using the data in the Treasury model to compare the actual with the required outcome in terms of interest rates, employment, unemployment, manufacturing output and house prices.

Mr. Mellor: It has not, since 1978, been the practice to run particular simulations on the Treasury model to meet specific outside requests; but the hon. Member will be aware that the current version of the model is available for Members' use through the Library.

Community Charge

Mr. Radice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has concerning the percentage of gross income accounted for by the community charge at different levels of gross income.

Mr. Mellor: Community charges vary widely according to the area in which households happen to live; their entitlement to transitional relief; and their entitlement to community charge benefit. Information on the relationship between these net payments and gross income will be available in due course from sample surveys such as the 1990 family expenditure survey.

The Gulf

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic consequences of a military option in the Gulf.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 29 November 1990]:* The Government's firm objective is to resolve the Gulf crisis by peaceful means on the basis of full implementation of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council. To achieve this, it is essential to establish a credible military option, so that Saddam Hussein is left in no doubt that he is facing a military force which could compel him to leave Kuwait. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) drew attention in his autumn statement to uncertainties in the economic outlook generated by the Gulf crisis.

Manufacturing Trade

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the increase in imports of manufactures since 1973 originated in other EEC countries; whether he expects the figure to increase or decrease as a result of (i) the Single European Act and (ii) full membership of the EMS; and what is the latest figure for import penetration for the EEC.

Mr. Mellor: A total of 57 per cent. of the increase in the value of imports of manufactures between 1973 and 1989 originated from the EC. The EC's share in the United Kingdom's total trade, both exports and imports, can be expected to rise as a result of the Single European Act and full membership of the EMS. Figures for import penetration in each of the EC countries can be obtained from the latest issue of "International Financial Statistics", published by the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year since 1970 and for the latest quarter, in index form based on 1985, the volume of exports of manufactures from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.
The information is in the table.

Index of volume of exports of manufactured goods

1985 = 100 Seasonally adjusted

		United Kingdom	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*France*	*United States of America*	*Japan*
1970		62	46	45	60	27
1971		67	48	49	60	33
1972		67	53	55	66	35
1973		76	61	61	81	37
1974		80	69	70	94	43
1975		78	57	68	91	44
1976		85	64	74	95	55
1977		91	67	80	95	60
1978		90	70	83	101	60
1979		90	74	92	109	59
1980		91	78	92	122	69
1981		85	81	94	116	77
1982		87	84	92	100	74
1983		87	83	94	94	82
1984		94	95	99	100	95
1985		100	100	100	100	100
1986		104	102	106	99	99
1987		112	105	111	112	99
1988		120	112	121	132	103
1989		132	122	131	146	108
1990	Q1	140	130	144	165	106
	Q2	145	n/a	n/a	n/a	111
	Q3	142	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source:
United Kingdom figures from the CSO Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics.
All other countries from the United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.

THE ARTS

British Library

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts what assessment he has made of the effect on scientific research in the United Kingdom of financial decisions imposed on the British library, including the cut in scientific journals.

Mr. Renton: It is for the British library board to decide on the allocation of its resources, taking into account the needs of its clients. The library is arranging alternative access where possible to the scientific journals and hopes to reinstate them in 1992. Most of them will continue to be taken by the library's document supply centre. The grant in aid for 1991-92 will be £63·79 million, an increase of 10 per cent. over the current year.

Performing Arts (Deficits)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the level of deficits in performing arts companies.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* I am advised by the funding bodies that in total the accumulated forecast deficits at the end of this financial year for performing arts companies, including theatre companies, in Britain will be approximately £20·8 million. There are wide variations in the financial circumstances of the companies, both national and regional, within this total.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on *(a)* national and *(b)* regional theatre companies in deficit.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* I understand that in total the accumulated forecast deficits at the end of the current financial year for the two national theatre companies are just over £3 million. The figure for other Arts Council-funded theatre companies is approximately £3·5 million, and the figure for theatre companies funded by the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils and the regional arts associations is approximately £2·5 million. There are wide variations in the financial circumstances of individual companies, both national and regional, within these estimates.

PRIME MINISTER

Downing Street (Gates)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to dismantle the gates at the end of Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 6 December at column *166*.

Fiscal and Environmental Policy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now take steps to achieve the integration of fiscal and environmental policy.

The Prime Minister: We already seek to ensure that all the environmental implications of policy decisions under discussion are considered before conclusions are reached. My right hon. Friend has nominated the Minister of State, Treasury the Minister responsible for considering the environmental implications of policies.

Ministerial Committee on the Environment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister how he intends to ensure parliamentary accountability of the new ministerial committee on the environment.

The Prime Minister: Cabinet Committees are internal mechanisms for co-ordinating policy within Government. They do not affect ministerial accountability to Parliament.

Parliamentary Sitting Times

Ms. Harman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish a review of the hours at which the House sits and the dates of the summer recess.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir R. McCrindle) on 6 December at column 452.

Nature Conservation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister is responsible for answering for the actions of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; and if he will publish a table showing the resource allocations to England, Scotland and Wales and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee for 1991-92 as compared with the recommendations in the Inbucon report.

The Prime Minister: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is a committee of all three country councils each of which is answerable to its own territorial Secretary of State for all its functions, including those exercised through the JNCC. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment would normally expect to take the lead in answering any questions about the committee.

The predecessor of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 9 November that the grant in aid to the Nature Conservancy Council for England (NCCE) in 1991-92 had been set provisionally at £32·411 million. Announcements about the grant in aid to be provided to the new agencies in Scotland and Wales will be made shortly by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales respectively.

The Inbucon report was commissioned by the Nature Conservancy Council to assist it in preparing its proposed forward plans. It was made available on request by the council in October. The figures contained in the report are therefore already available for examination.

Hospitals (Foreign Use)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister how many unused or disused civilian or military hospitals in the United Kingdom are owned or run by foreign Governments or armies; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Details of civilian hospitals owned or run by foreign Governments are not available.

United States forces have contingency hospitals at RAF Chessington, RAF Little Rissington, RAF Nocton Hall and RAF Bicester. These are laid out as hospitals, but supplies and staff have to be brought in to activate them at a time of crisis.

ENVIRONMENT

Village Green, Bromley Cross

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to hold a public inquiry into the ownership of the common land known as the village green at Brick Back, Bromley Cross, Bolton; what representations he has received about this land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The ownership of the land at Brick Back, which has been registered as village green, has been referred to a commons commissioner, in accordance with section 8 of the Commons Registration Act 1965. A commissioner will hear evidence on ownership at a hearing to be held on 12 February 1991 at Bolton town hall. To date a number of representations have been received from Bromley Cross residents, four of whom claim to have knowledge of the ownership of the land.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of persons subject to the community charge who are exempted on the basis of category C9: residential care workers who are employed at a very low salary for each local authority in England.

Mr. Key: From the returns received by the Department, the table gives the information requested for those authorities which reported 20 or more persons in the category of exemptions on 1 June 1990. The average proportion for England as a whole is ·004 per cent.

Number of residential care workers employed at a very low salary who were exempt from the personal community charge on 1 June 1990, as a percentage of the number of persons subject to a personal community charge on 1 June 1990

Authority	*Per cent.*
Camden	0·01
Cotswold	0·04
East Dorset	0·16
Forest of Dean	0·08
Hackney	0·07
Hillingdon	0·02
Leicester	0·01
Liverpool	0·01
Northavon	0·07
Plymouth	0·02
Richmond-on-Thames	0·04
Scarborough	0·12
Stockton-on-Tees	0·02
Wakefield	0·01
Wandsworth	0·02
Wealden	0·03

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to protect community charge payers from cuts in local authority services due to community charge limitations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The action we have taken, and shall not hesitate to take again, is to protect charge payers from authorities' excessive budgets.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will undertake a review of the level of aggregate external finance being made available to local authorities in 1991-92;

(2) if he will undertake a review of the level of revenue support grant being made available to local authorities in 1991-92;

(3) when he intends to bring before the House the final reports of the local authority finance settlement for 1991-92;

(4) if he will undertake a review of the phased withdrawal of the area protection grant from local authorities in 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Formal consultation on our proposals for the local government finance settlement ended on 28 November. My right hon. Friend is now considering the representations made. He expects to lay the settlement reports before the House soon.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his best estimates of the size of the average poll tax bill in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has made no estimate of the average level of community charges in 1991-92, which depends upon the decisions of the local authorities. If authorities spent in line with their standard spending assessments, the average community charge should be close to £380.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to conclude his review of the poll tax;

(2) if he has any plans to undertake a fundamental review of the poll tax transitional relief scheme for its operation in 1991-92;

(3) if he has any plans to undertake a fundamental review of the operation of the joint and several liability provisions of the poll tax for 1991-92;

(4) if he will list all those bodies he intends to consult on the future of local government finance.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend announced on 5 December that we shall be conducting a fundamental review of local government finance and structure.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to undertake a review of the existing restrictions on the use of capital receipts by local authorities for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: We are already consulting on changes which we consider to be necessary for 1991-92. The local authority associations have recently submitted a paper setting out their proposals and this will be considered carefully.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people serving in Her Majesty's forces have appealed against their being included on the community charge register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a review of his proposed poll tax-capping rules for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: As I told the House on 3 December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I stick firmly by the intended criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) on 31 October.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local authority his proposed basic credit approval for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: Basic credit approvals for individual local authorities for 1991-92 will be announced in due course. I will arrange for a copy of this information to be placed in the Library of the House of Commons when it is available.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to review his proposed standard spending assessments for local authorities for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: We are considering the representations made in response to our proposals for 1991-92 as set out in the statement on 31 October. We will announce our decisions shortly.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all working papers, implementation documents, departmental circulars and other publications, regulations and notices, in draft or final form, that have been issued in 1990 arising from the implementation of the poll tax.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* My Department has issued the following regulations, practice notes and consultation documents on the community charge and the national non-domestic rating system in 1990.

Regulations

The Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) Regulations 1990/2

The Standard Community Charge (Multipliers) Order 1990/129

The Non-Domestic Rating (Collection and Enforcement) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1990/145

The Community Charges (Co-owners) Regulations 1990/146

The Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) Regulations 1990/156

The Standard Community Charge and Non-Domestic Rating (Definition of Domestic Property) Order 1990/162

The Wimbledon and Putney Commons (Special Levies) Regulations 1990/201

The Commons Regulations (Therfield) Provisional Order Confirmation Act 1988 (Amendment) Order 1990/233

The City of London (Non-Domestic Rating Multiplier) Order 1990/340

The Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/366

The Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (City of London) Regulations 1990/369

The Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/402

The Personal Community Charge (Exemption for the Severely Mentally Impaired) Order 1990/462

The Central Rating Lists (Amendment) Regulations 1990/502

Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (No. 2) Regulations 1990/545

The Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of Lists and Appeals) Regulations 1990/582

The Non-Domestic Rating (Transitional Period) Regulations 1990/608

The Non-Domestic Rating (Caravan Sites) Regulations 1990/673

The Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/711

The Personal Community Charge (Qualifying Courses of Education) Regulations 1990/712

The Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of Lists and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/769

The Local Government Finance (Repeals, Savings and Consequential Amendments) Order 1990/776

The General Rate Act 1967 and Related Provisions (Savings and Consequential Provision) Regulations 1990/777

The Gas and Electricity Industries (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1990/804

The Community Charges (Notices) (Substitute Charges) (England) Regulations 1990/942

The Local Government Finance (Miscellaneous Amendments and Repeal) Order 1990/1285

The Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1990/1426

The Central Rating Lists (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1990/1566

The Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of Lists and Appeals) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1990/1822

The Non-Domestic Rating (Payment of Interest) Regulations 1990/1904

The Personal Community Charge (Students) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/1986.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of Lists and Appeals) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1990/2025.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Transitional Period) (No. 2) Regulations 1990/2329.

The Non-Domestic Rating Contributions (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1990/2472

Practice Notes

The Community Charge: Maintaining the Community Charge Register—Community Charge Practice No. 24.

Non-domestic rates: Transitional Arrangements—Non-domestic rates Practice Note No. 3.

Non-domestic rates: The Boundary between the Community Charge and Non-domestic (Business) rates: Definition of Domestic Property—Non-domestic rates Practice Note No. 4.

Non-Domestic rates: Alteration of Lists and Appeals—Non-domestic rates Practice Note No. 5.

Non-domestic rates: Discretionary Rate Relief—A Non-domestic rates Practice Note.

Consultation Documents

Non-domestic rating: Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.

Business rates: Valuation of Property formerly in Enterprise Zones

The Standard Community Charge and other Matters.

Community Charge Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will undertake a review of his estimates of poll tax collection rates for 1990-91 and the likely impact on poll tax bills in 1991-92;

(2) what are his best estimates of the amount of poll tax income that will prove impossible to collect by the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Portillo: When local authorities come to set community charges for 1991-92 they will make proper estimates of the likely level of collection for that year and of how much uncollected in 1990-91 will prove to be uncollectable and should be written off. Such estimates are not for me to make.

Boundary Review, Humberside

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the amount of staff time in hours and *(c)* the number of meetings of the commission and the attendance at each devoted by the Local Government Boundary Commission to (i) the interim report and (ii) the draft proposal in its further review of the county of Humberside and list the changes occurring in the commission and its staff between the two.

Mr. Key: In the period between the publication of its interim report and its draft proposals, two new members were appointed to fill vacancies on the commission, and eight staff out of a total of 35 at all grades were changed. It is not possible to identify the cost of any particular element of the commission's work.

The other questions concerning the conduct of its work are for the commission.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings or discussions occurred between *(a)* himself or his predecessors, *(b)* other Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials of the Local Government Boundary Commission on its review of county Humberside between 7 March and 27 November.

Mr. Key: None, though the chairman of the commission meets Ministers from time to time to discuss matters of general interest.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will refer back to the local authority boundary commission the further review of the county of Humberside, for reconsideration by a commission with changes in composition from that which considered the further review.

Mr. Key: No.

Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans his Department has for consulting with non-governmental development organisations in the preparatory process for the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in Brazil in 1992;

(2) what plans his Department has for holding national consultations in preparation for the United Nations conference on environment and development in 1992.

Mr. Trippier: My Department has commissioned the International Institute for Environment and Development, on behalf of the United Kingdom committee for UNEP, to hold a series of public meetings to examine the main issues of the 1992 United Nations conference. This will be an important opportunity for the non-governmental community, including development organisations, to contribute to the preparatory process for the conference. In addition, we will welcome submissions from interested individuals or organisations who may wish to put forward their views directly to the Government.

Peat

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 22 November, *Official Report*, columns *188-89*, to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), what further consideration Her Majesty's Government are giving to the issues raised by peat extraction and nature conservation.

Mr. Yeo: The noble Lord Reay's response to the debate on peatland issues, which took place in another place on 9 May 1990, indicated the issues which should be addressed and how they were to be carried forward. Work on these is progressing both in my Department and elsewhere, but is not yet completed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to be able to make a statement about the issues raised by peat extraction and nature conservation in due course.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he intends to make to the criticisms contained in the Nature Conservancy Council report published on 28 November about the reorganisation of the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Baldry: None. These issues were fully dealt with during the debates in both Houses on part VII of the Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that Britain's ecology continues to be treated as a continuum, following the break-up of the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Baldry: Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, ecological issues affecting Great Britain as a whole will fall within the remit of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee of the three new country councils.

Ecology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a review of the resources devoted by his Department to developing and maintaining standards of ecological understanding among its officials.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has access to a wide range of expertise within his Department, including knowledge of ecological matters. Training needs are regularly monitored, and there is no need for a specific review in this area.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy with regard to the proposal by Senor Enrico Ferri, MEP, in his report to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens Rights (PE 143.353/fin, 5 November 1990), that provisions for liability for impairment to the environment caused by radioactive waste be included in the EC directive on civil liability caused by waste (COM(89) 282 final-C3-0154/89-SYN 217).

Mr. Baldry: The Government are considering their position on the draft directive, and will be consulting widely.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) in how many cases in the last five years sufficient damage has been inflicted upon sites of special scientific interest to render designation meaningless;

(2) how many sites of special scientific interest have been damaged by statutory organisations during the last five years; and in how many of these cases either official permission was given or official approval was signified.

Mr. Baldry: The information is not available in the form requested. Since 1 April 1984 information on the numbers of SSSIs damaged is set out in the Nature Conservancy Council's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of sites of special scientific interest which have been damaged or destroyed during the last three years; and what is his estimate of the area affected by this damage or destruction.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number damaged*	*Estimated area (ha)*
1987-88	166	27,297
1988-89	241	30,067
1989-90	324	91,677

This includes damage of all kinds whether significant or not. It includes proposed SSSIs and both those SSSIs notified under the 1981 Act and those notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and not yet renotified.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the present level of protection is sufficient to safeguard the 900 sites which are assessed to be of key importance in their conservation interest; and what action he is taking to provide the necessary protection.

Mr. Baldry: I am satisfied that the SSSI and the national nature reserve systems afford the protection necessary to these sites.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to reduce the damage or destruction of sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Baldry: We are always ready to consider with the NCC and others practicable action to minimise damage to SSSIs. The NCC is encouraged to take all steps necessary to minimise damage, including the entering into of management agreements and in appropriate circumstances by requesting that the Secretary of State make a nature conservation order.

Environmental Protection Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has received an invitation to participate in the conference on environmental protection in practice, organised by International Business Communications, to be held in London on 10 to 11 December.

Mr. Baldry: Yes. Dr. Martin Bigg, head of the local authority unit of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, will be addressing the conference on the subject of pollution regulation.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has received an invitation to contribute to the conference on liquid effluent control to be held at Loughborough university of technology on 17 to 19 December.

Mr. Baldry: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) was invited by the department of chemical engineering at Loughborough university to contribute to the conference on liquid effluent control on 17 to 19 December 1990. HMIP was unable to accept the invitation on this occasion due to other commitments.

Domestic Insulation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much annual central Government expenditure was dedicated to domestic insulation projects for the years 1979 to 1990.

Mr. Yeo: Expenditure on central Government domestic energy efficiency programmes is set out in the table.

£ million

	Homes insulation scheme England	*Community insulation project Great Britain*
1979-80	16·1	—
1980-81	16·1	—
1981-82	23·7	—
1982-83	29·4	—
1983-84	24·9	5·5
1984-85	25·2	8·6
1985-86	27·6	19·4
1986-87	25·2	36·6
1987-88	21·3	45·2
1988-89	7·2	n/a
[1]1989-90	7·0	n/a

n/a Not available.
[1] Provisional.

For the corresponding information about the homes insulation scheme in Wales and Scotland I refer the hon. Member to the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

Trees and Hedgerows

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of trees and hedgerows which have been lost to the United Kingdom, on an annual basis, for the years 1979 to 1989.

Mr. Baldry: No records of the number of trees lost in the period are available. In the storms of 1987 and 1990 we estimate that some 19 million trees were destroyed—mostly in woodlands. However, despite such losses woodland cover in Great Britain has increased from some 2 million hectares to over 2·3 million hectares in the past 10 years.

Various estimates of hedgerow loss have been made for past periods but none covers precisely the period to which the hon. Member refers. A survey of landscape change in England and Wales carried out for my Department and the Countryside Commission in 1986 by Hunting Technical Services Ltd. showed annual losses of some 2,600 miles of hedgerow between 1947 and 1969, 2,900 miles between 1969 and 1980, and 4,000 miles between 1980 and 1985. However a postal survey of farmers carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1985 showed annual losses of 500 miles between 1980 and 1985. The two surveys used different methodologies and neither can be regarded as definitive. Work is continuing to improve information both on the rate of removal and on the extent of new planting.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the mileage of hedgerows which have been removed from England and Wales during the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: Various estimates have been made for past periods but none covers precisely the period to which the hon. Member refers.

A survey of landscape change in England and Wales carried out for my Department and the Countryside Commission in 1986 by Hunting Technical Services Ltd. showed annual losses of some 2,600 miles of hedgerow between 1947 and 1969, 2,900 miles between 1969 and 1980, and 4,000 miles between 1980 and 1985. However, a postal survey of farmers carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1985 showed annual losses of 500 miles between 1980 and 1985. The two surveys used different methodologies and neither can be regarded as definitive.

Work is continuing to improve information both on the rate of removal and on the extent of new planting.

UN Environment Programme

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much financial support was given to the United Nations Environment Programme, on an annual basis, for the years 1979 to 1989.

Mr. Baldry: Contributions by Her Majesty's Government to the United Nations Environment Programme's environment fund for the period 1979 to 1989 are as follows:

	£
1979-80	600,000
1980-81	600,000
1981-82	600,000
1982-83	600,000
1983-84	750,000
1984-85	750,000
1985-86	750,000
1986-87	1,000,000
1987-88	1,000,000
1988-89	1,250,000

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to encourage the expansion of the United Nations Environment Programme's role in co-ordinating international environmental action.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom is pressing for UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation to be charged with overseeing negotiations of a framework convention on climate change. We are also playing an active role in UNEP's preparations for a global convention on biological diversity. It is the aim for both conventions to be ready for the 1992 UN conference on environment and development at which we hope that decisions on strengthening UNEP will be taken.

As evidence of our support for UNEP we intend to increase our 1991 contribution to its voluntary environment fund by one third to £4 million.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of grant and or subsidy was provided to inland waterway freight for each year between 1978 and 1989.

Mr. Baldry: The British Waterways Board (BWB) receives annual grant in aid from the Exchequer towards the cost of operating and maintaining all its waterways. The table shows the board's external financing limit (EFL), which covers grant and borrowing, for the years 1978-79 to 1989-90.

BWB finance 1978-79 to 1989-90

£ million

	EFL (outturn) (cash)	*EFL (outturn) (1990-91 prices)*
1978-79	26·0	65·5
1979-80	25·7	55·5
1980-81	30·0	54·8
1981-82	31·6	52·5
1982-83	39·3	60·9
1983-84	40·8	60·4
1984-85	42·8	60·4
1985-86	44·1	59·1
1986-87	44·8	58·2
1987-88	45·0	55·4
1988-89	44·8	51·4
1989-90	46·9	50·6

Waterways are nowadays used mainly for recreation and amenity; excluding maritime traffic, they carry only 1·5 per cent. of total inland freight. BWB's share of total inland freight (all modes) is 0·1 per cent. All freight traffic on the board's network is now carried by private sector operators. The Government wish to see maximum use of rivers and canals for freight transport where commercially sensible. But customers should be free to choose the mode of transport best suited to their needs. The Government's role is to ensure that conditions of competition are fair, and subject to proper safety and environmental standards.

However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport can give grants under section 36 of the Transport Act 1981 towards inland waterway freight facilities which bring significant environmental benefits by keeping lorries off unsuitable roads and where, in the absence of grant, the commercial decision would be to use road transport. Five grants, with a total value of £1·4 million, have been awarded up to 1989.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources; and if he will specify the non-governmental agencies which are based in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources show that it has 663 members and that 119 countries are represented in this membership. I am arranging for a copy of the membership lists to be placed in the Library of the House.

Vacant Public Land

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the relationship between the terms vacant public sector land used in the title of the consultation paper, "Encouraging the Use of Vacant Public Sector Land" and the terms underused or unused land used in the body of the paper.

Mr. Yeo: Existing and proposed arrangements for entry on registers and for the power to direct disposal relate to unused and underused land. The term "vacant land" is employed in the paper as a general term covering both.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether the Government are considering any proposals requiring the purchasers of the unused or underused land to bring the land forward for development within a fixed timetable or else to return the land to the local authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the windfall profits arising from the sale by developers of land currently owned by local authorities will be shared with those authorities if the consultation paper, "Encouraging the Use of Vacant Public Sector Land", becomes Government policy;

(3) for what reasons he has limited the grounds of appeal referred to in the consultation paper, "Encouraging the Use of Vacant Public Sector Land", so as not to include an appeal on the basis that the land referred to is not unused or underused, or that the method and timing of disposal is imprudent.

Mr. Yeo: In the consultation paper we proposed that tenderers for a franchise would be required to state their plans for the development and use of the sites included in the package (paragraph 3.18(b)); that arrangements for clawback would be triggered by certain events listed (annex C paragraph 11); and that the grounds of appeal to which owners making representations would be limited would include certain grounds listed (paragraph 3.16). Responses to the consultation paper have included the points raised by the hon. Member and will be taken into account in our further consideration of these issues.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his reasons for proposing in the consultation paper, "Encouraging the Use of Vacant Public Sector Land", a requirement for local authorities to pay for the discounts which will be given to developers to purchase local authority land assets.

Mr. Yeo: The discounts were proposed as an incentive to bring as many as possible of the sites contained in each franchise package into use. Public sector owners dissatisfied with the arrangements could bring into use or dispose of their sites before directions establishing a franchise were issued. All the responses to the consultation paper are currently being analysed and will be taken into account in our further consideration of measures to encourage the use of vacant public land.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guideliness and regulations exist about conflicts of interest in respect of local authority boundary commissioners' connections with authorities whose boundaries are being considered.

Mr. Key: Paragraph 6 of schedule 7 to the Local Government Act 1972 provides that the commission's procedure at, and in connection with, its meetings shall be such as it may from time to time determine.

My right hon. Friend is confident that the commission ensures that no such conflicts arise.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many instances the interim decisions of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England have been substantially different from its draft proposals; and what percentage of total references this constitutes.

Mr. Key: Since decisions on the conduct of reviews are by statute for the commission, the Department does not monitor changes in the views expressed by the commission in its work leading up to a final report. It is implicit, however, in the statutory provisions which ensure that the public has an opportunity to comment on draft proposals, that the commission will take note of these comments, and from time to time change its views.

Valuation and Community Charge Tribunals

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals have been made to the West Yorkshire valuation and community charge tribunal on the question of *(a)* rating valuation assessments, *(b)* community charge registrations and *(c)* level of payment of community charge.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
(a) Non-domestic rating appeals	3,053
(b) Community charge appeals	122
(c) None. This is not one of the prescribed grounds for making an appeal.	

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many amendments have been made to the practice notes used by the valuation and community charge tribunals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department has issued three letters updating the following community charge practice notes:

Letter	*Practice note*
18 September 1989	No. 18—Foreign Diplomats and Visiting Forces No. 21—Community Charge Benefit (2)
26 October 1989	No. 9—Sole or Main Residence No. 18—Foreign Diplomats and Visiting Forces
29 December 1989	No. 17—United Kingdom Service Personnel No. 18—Foreign Diplomats and Visiting Forces

In addition to these letters three practice notes have been updated and reissued. These are:

Practice Note No. 10: Data Protection and the Community Charge (2)—(updates Practice Note No. 4)

Practice Note No. 19: Exemptions from the Personal Community Charge (2)—(updates Practice Note No. 2)

Practice Note No. 21: Community Charge Benefit (2)—(updates Practice Note No. 5)

The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation is currently revising and updating the practice notes with a view to reflecting changes and modifications brought about by practice and decisions made by the valuation and community charge tribunals.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received over the variations in the decisions taken by valuation and community charge tribunals on the appeals concerning the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I am not aware that any such representations have been received. The 56 tribunals in England are independent. They must decide each case on its merits and are responsible for their own decisions.

Basildon District Council

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Basildon district council on his proposed financial settlement for 1991-92; if he will publish those representations and any reply sent by his Department; and if he intends to meet representatives of the council in the near future.

Mr. Portillo: I have received representations from Basildon district council on the proposed 1991-92 settlement. It is for the authority to make public its representations if it so chooses. I have no plans at present to meet a delegation from the council.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Ordnance Survey corporate plan for 1991 to 1994.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today approved the Ordnance Survey corporate plan for 1991-94 and I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Dogs

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for local authorities of the provisions on dog control in the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and when he proposes to bring the new measures into effect.

Mr. Baldry: The measures proposed in the "Action on Dogs" consultation paper published by my Department last year were widely welcomed by local authorities. They have now been incorporated in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Act places duties on district councils and London boroughs to collect and detain stray dogs, to return them to their owners or find them a suitable home or have them humanely destroyed if necessary and to enforce the existing requirement to wear a collar and tag in a public place. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has also announced more flexible powers to make byelaws to prevent dog fouling and to control dogs in certain public areas.

In view of the widespread public concern about straying and fouling we want to encourage local authorities to act on these provisions as soon as possible. Many authorities already employ dog wardens and I would encourage others to follow their example and make greater use of their existing powers. We will be holding discussions with the local authority associations and other interested parties about the timing and additional resource implications of implementing the new duties and powers.

Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to the report from the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on "Paying for Pollution—Civil Liability for Damage Caused by Waste" (HL paper 84-1).

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The report is to advise the House of Lords on questions of policy or principle and the advisability of debate and the Committee Chairman, Lord Nathan, has now tabled a motion for such a debate. We have already told him that we shall be looking at the report in relation to the draft directive and our further development of policies in this field. We would, of course, contribute to any debate.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the EC proposal for a Council regulation on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community [Com(90)415 Final-SYN 305] published on 10 October.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The Department will submit an explanatory memorandum to Parliament on this proposal in the near future.

Cost Recovery Charges

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent meetings have been held between Ministers or officials of his Department and representatives of the Engineering Employers Federation concerning cost recovery charges being introduced under the Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* Representatives of the Engineering Employers Federation have recently had meetings with both the Minister of State and with officials of the Department to discuss implementation of integrated pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, including cost recovery charges.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the oversight that will be conducted by his Department over income earned by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and local authorities from granting of industrial operating licences for cost recovery under the Environmental Protection Act.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The cost recovery charges to be made under the Environmental Protection Act by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) and by local authorities for air pollution control are set by the Secretary of State for the Environment with the approval of the Treasury. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's finances are scrutinised through the annual MINIS review of the Department's operation; and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will publish a report on income from charges at the end of each financial year. Local authorities will be required to make annual returns on income from pollution control charges, and the Department will publish a digest of this information.

Business in the Environment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he *(a)* last met and *(b)* next expects to meet the chairman of the Business in the Environment group; and what matters were or are expected to be discussed.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* My right hon. Friend, then Secretary of State, last met the chairman of Business in the Environment on 8 November 1990 during the launch of the publication, "Your Business

and the Environment: An Executive Guide". My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside has agreed that a further meeting should take place in the new year, at which various business and environment issues will be discussed.

Fire and Civil Defence (Yorkshire)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority on his proposed financial settlement for 1991-92; what consideration he has given to those representations; if he will publish details of those representations; and if he will make a statement on the implications of his proposals for the fire service in South Yorkshire.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* We have received a number of representations from the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority on our proposals for the revenue support grant settlement for 1991-92, including those put to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, when he met a delegation from the authority on 27 November. It is for the authority to make public its representations if it so chooses.

We are proposing to increase the authority's standard spending assessment by £3·2 million to £25·7 million, which we believe to be an appropriate assessment of the costs of providing the fire service in South Yorkshire. We shall carefully consider all the representations received before taking our decisions on the settlement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which accountancy firms would be prevented from writing up board minutes and then auditing the same.

Mr. Redwood: I see no reason to do so. Under existing legislation, a person who is an officer of a company—or a partner or employee of an officer—is prohibited from being appointed an auditor of the company. Moreover, under the Companies Act 1989 the Secretary of State will be able to recognise a supervisory body for auditors only if the body appears to him to have adequate rules and practices designed to ensure that company audit work is conducted properly and with integrity, and that persons are not appointed as company auditors in circumstances in which they have any interest likely to conflict with the proper conduct of the audit.

Water Pollution

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy to propose legislation under which all shareholders would be made aware of the amount of waste discharged by companies into the rivers and sea.

Mr. Redwood: No. It would be unreasonably burdensome to require companies to provide such information. Companies are best placed to decide, in the light of their individual circumstances, whether this information is likely to be of interest to their shareholders and other users of their reports and accounts.

Public Accountability

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has taken any steps to increase public accountability of the bodies listed in section 389 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: Part II of the Companies Act 1989, which establishes a new supervisory system for the control and regulation of auditors, sets out clearly the standards which the bodies, seeking recognition as supervisory bodies, must meet.

Good Will

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department will issue guidance on the accounting treatment for good will.

Mr. Redwood: No. The Accounting Standards Board is currently considering the responses to the exposure draft proposing a revised standard on accounting for good will.

Consumer Credit Act

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for revising the Consumer Credit Act to ensure that *(a)* advance payments are held in trust and not treated as company assets and *(b)* contracts end automatically with liquidation.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend has no proposals for such legislation.

Price Level Accounting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will recommend a system of price level accounting to major public limited companies.

Mr. Redwood: No. The role of current values in financial reporting is one of the subjects that the Accounting Standards Board will address in the course of its consideration of responses to the exposure draft on accounting for fixed assets and revaluations.

Innovation and Technology Transfer

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department is planning to hold any events in the northern region of England to publicise the EC's SPRINT programme.

Mr. Leigh: National publicity material available from DTI regional offices contains SPRINT information and local awareness events are often organised by them. EC and departmental initiatives are publicised at such events; however, no specific SPRINT event has been planned in the north-east.

A national "SPRINT roadshow" was widely publicised and run at venues reflecting the degree of interest shown; the north of England show took place in Manchester on 5 December 1990.

I was pleased to note the new SPRINT award concerning RTC—North in Sunderland.

EC Financial Directives

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in negotiations on the terms of the investment services directive; and what issues remain to be determined.

Mr. Redwood: There have been many meetings of officials under the Italian presidency on this important market-opening measure. Ministers have considered it twice at ECOFIN.

The main area of political controversy centres on the proposal, originally put forward by France, that certain transactions be confined to "regulated" markets. This was discussed at the meetings of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers which I attended on 19 November and 3 December. It will be discussed further at ECOFIN on 17 December. The United Kingdom Government are opposed to the principle of such a restriction. Whatever is proposed must not compromise the ability of investors anywhere in the Community to choose how to invest their money.

Other matters subject to negotiation include:

whether members of the professions, appointed representatives and sole traders (natural persons) should be included in the scope of the directive;

the inclusion of conduct of business principles;

whether banks should have direct access to membership of stock exchanges; and

whether certain rules governing the conduct of business should be disapplied to inter-professional dealing.

The Government will continue to press hard in the negotiations to achieve the best possible outcome on the directive as a whole for United Kingdom investment firms, United Kingdom investors and financial markets.

Building Works

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish tables showing *(a)* the number of new buildings, *(b)* the amount spent on new buildings, *(c)* the amount spent on repairs and maintenance and *(d)* the amount spent on building renovation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* The Department periodically gives up buildings and takes on others in response to lease conditions and operational needs. Some buildings are new and some are taken over from previous tenants. The number of new buildings taken on to the estate is not readily available.

Information is also not readily available to distinguish major project expenditure in new buildings from that on renovation of existing buildings. However, since 1 April 1988 total expenditure by the Department on major projects for both purposes has been:

	£'000s
1988-89	17,784
1989-90	29,858
[1]1990-91	39,800

[1] Estimate.

Before 1 April 1988 the Department of the Environment Property Services Agency was responsible for major project expenditure in buildings occupied by the Department of the Trade and Industry.

There has been a progressive transfer of responsibility for repair and maintenance expenditure from the Department of the Environment Property Services Agency/Property Holdings to the Department of Trade and Industry with a particularly large transfer occurring in 1990-91 related to the division of the civil estate. The coverage of departmental expenditure is not therefore on a consistent basis over the period. However, expenditure on repairs and maintenance delegated to the Department over the last five years has been as follows:

	£000s
1986-87	2,477
1987-88	2,857
1988-89	4,771
1989-90	4,710
1990-91	[1]10,713

[1] Estimate.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* Information about the number and levels of remuneration of people appointed to non-departmental public bodies is contained in the annual publication "Public Bodies". A copy of the current issue is held by the House of Commons Library, and "Public Bodies 1990" is expected to be published later this month.

The other information requested is not kept centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

USSR (Food)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what food aid has been sent to the Soviet Union by the United Kingdom in the past month; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy to distribute the EEC food surpluses as urgent aid to the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will meet the Soviet Union Foreign Minister to discuss what assistance he can give to solve Russia's food shortages; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make it his policy to launch a food aid package to the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are concerned about the shortage of many foodstuffs in Soviet shops, and have discussed the problem with the Soviet authorities and with our European partners. There will be further discussion of Soviet economic problems at the European Council in Rome on 13 and 14 December. Where a real need exists and distribution can be assured, the European Community may be able to help with food aid from intervention stocks. Following a good harvest in 1990, the shortages in certain Soviet cities are chiefly the result of distribution difficulties. We would like to help to tackle the underlying problems through technical assistance. Food distribution is a top priority for our know-how fund. A consortium of British

companies is already conducting a survey of the food distribution system around Kiev which may have implications for other parts of the Soviet Union.

Antarctica

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conclusions between the treaty parties that met in Santiago de Chile to discuss exploitation of minerals and environmental protection for Antarctica; and what conclusion was made on a percentage of the land mass to be used as a wildlife park.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The meeting, which was called by the United Kingdom and Chile, ended on 7 December. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss comprehensive measures for the protection of the Antarctic environment.

A communiqué will be issued by the conference secretariat in due course, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the countries represented at the conference on Antarctica which support a ban of future mineral mining and those which do not do so.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Of the consultative parties to the Antarctic treaty, Australia, France, Belgium, Italy, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden and Peru supported the call for a total ban on mining; the remaining 18 consultative parties (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Germany, India, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, China, Poland, South Korea, South Africa, Spain, USSR, USA, United Kingdom and Uruguay) did not.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he now supports a permanent ban on mineral mining in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Our primary objective is to achieve a return to consensus within the Antarctic treaty system. There remain differing views on how best to achieve this, and we remain prepared to discuss the options. We do not believe that a permanent ban on mineral activity will achieve a consensus which is rational and scientifically based.

Mr. Alois Brunner

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether, since the renewal of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Syria, he has consulted his ministerial counterparts in France, Germany and Austria to ensure that Alois Brunner, who now lives in Syria, is tried for war crimes;

(2) what representations he intends to make to the Syrian Government to ensure that Alois Brunner is tried for war crimes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has no special responsibility in this matter. We have not been approached for assistance by the Governments mentioned by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Guatemala

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made concerning killings and disappearances in Guatemala, in particular those listed by Amnesty International.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We and our EC partners have regularly made clear to the Guatemalan Government our serious concern about human rights abuses. In the past year, British Ministers have raised human rights three times with Guatemalan Ministers, and our ambassador has raised the plight of street children. He and his EC colleagues have also made representations about the shootings at Santiago de Atitlan on 2 December.

Overseas Electors

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the ministerial and departmental visits made overseas in 1990 in connection with the promotion of the changes in the rights of overseas electors; what, in each case, was the cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No ministerial or departmental visits were made overseas in connection with the publicity arrangements for the rights of overseas electors under the Representation of the People Act 1989.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern Europe

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much in aid and assistance to eastern Europe has been spent and committed in 1990-91; and what is the nature of each programme on which money is being expended.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of how know-how funding to Poland has been applied hitherto; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: A total of £5,020,848 has been spent under the know-how fund for eastern Europe since the beginning of the 1990-91 financial year. We expect to spend the full £15 million allocated for assistance to eastern Europe by the end of this financial year. As to the nature of the programmes on which money has been spent, I refer to the replies I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 14 March at column *236*, for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock) on 13 June at column *213*, for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold) on 2 July at column *417*, and to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 17 October at column *813*. The additional activities approved since then under the know-how fund are as follows:

Poland

Title: Seeds Sector Training.
Description: 4 week training course by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany.
Status: Completed November 1990.
Cost: £55,000.

Title: Industrial Competitiveness.
Description: 3 month study by the Centre for Economic and Policy Research.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £27,000.

Title: Assistance to Employment Sector.
Description: Provision of advice Health and Safety, Employment Services Training and Small Firms.
Status: Under way October 1990.
Cost: £125,000.

Title: Book Sector Study.
Description: Study to form the basis of a medium term book development policy in Poland.
Status: Due to start January 1991.
Cost: £41,000.

Hungary

Title: Development of Employment Services.
Description: A two stage programme of visits to and from Hungary arranged by the Department of Employment to provide advice on how to develop employment services in Hungary.
Status: Due to start January 1991.
Cost: £16,070.

Title: Banking assistance.
Description: Visit by librarian of chartered Institute of Bankers to advise on the establishment of a library and specialist information centre at the International training centre for bankers in Budapest.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £4,000.

Title: Assistance to International Management Centre (IMC).
Description: To strengthen the IMC's training, research and consultancy programmes via a programme of visits over a three year period by leading British management specialists.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £60,000.

Title: Accountancy Crash Training.
Description: A six month programme of assistance to retrain all senior accountants in the principles and operation of the new Hungarian accountancy legislation.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £145,000.

Title: Assistance to Budapest Stock Exchange (BSE).
Description: Consultancy advice to help the BSE determine the most appropriate method of operation and regulatory arrangements for their new trading room and with this information to draw up the optimum physical specifications of the trading room.
Status: Will begin December 1990.
Cost: £60,000.

Czechoslovakia

Title: English Language Training for the State Bank.
Description: A three month intensive course in general and specialised English for senior staff of the Czechoslovakia State Bank.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £65,000.

Title: Economics for senior Officials.
Description: A programme of lectures and seminars to introduce senior Czechoslovak officials to market economics, and in particular the contemporary economic issues affecting government policy.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £9,500.

Title: Study of Environmental Problems of North Bohemia.
Description: A programme of visits by environmental scientists aimed at producing a report for the Czechoslovak government to better to understand the environmental problems of North Bohemia and to develop a realistic programme for their solution, including sources of finance.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £12,000.

Title: Establishment of an Industry and Conservation Association in Bratislava.
Description: A programme of visits and consultancy advice aimed at improving the handling of environmental problems in the local political economy by developing partnerships between industry, environmental NGO's and local government.
Status: To be implemented.
Cost: £28,000.

Title: Secondment to Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
Description: An official from the Department of Employment will be seconded to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for a 9 month period to co-ordinate and develop the programme of assistance in the labour field currently underway under KHF auspices.
Status: Will begin in December 1990.
Cost: £20,000.

Title: Support for World Bank Structural Adjustment Mission.
Description: Covering the costs of two United Kingdom experts taking part in a world bank mission looking at the social safety net in Czechoslovakia as a precursor to a major structural adjustment loan.
Status: Will begin December 1990.
Cost: £20,000.

Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland

Title: Assistance for Environmental NGO's.
Description: A programme of visits, exchanges and consultancy advice aimed at strengthening the network of environmental NGO's in all three countries.
Status: Under way.
Cost: £125,000 over two years.

Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part the Overseas Development Administration is playing in the preparatory process for the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in Brazil in 1992.

Mrs. Chalker: We have contributed US$25,000 to the voluntary fund established to finance participation by developing countries in the preparations for the conference. We have offered to help finance the preparation of national reports from Indonesia, Pakistan and Zimbabwe for the conference. Together with the Department of Trade and Industry we will be financing a study on technology transfer to help developing countries address environmental problems, with a focus on global warming. ODA officials played a full part in the first meeting of the preparatory committee for the conference in Nairobi in August, and will continue to do so at future meetings.

Angola

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the action the Government plan to take in support of the United Nations special relief programme for Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 6 December at column *204*.

Malawi

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Malawi concerning adherence to the African charter on human and peoples' rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcome Malawi's ratification of the African charter on human and peoples' rights. But it is not for us to monitor any state's implementation of its provisions. It is for the commission provided by the charter to do this.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Malawi concerning the continuing detention without trial of Jack Mapanje; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are concerned about Jack Mapanje's continued detention in Malawi and make frequent inquiries of the Malawian authorities about his case. Senior Malawian officials have recently told us that all cases of detention without trial are currently undergoing review.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Official Visits

25. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many visits he has made to the Duchy in the last fortnight.

Mr. Chris Patten: I visited the county palatine last month. I assure the hon. Member I shall be making plenty of further visits to it in the future.

HEALTH

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider taking steps to institute a system of required requests for kidney donation in order to increase the number of kidneys available for transplant.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have initiated an audit of all intensive care units in England to assess potential for organ procurement, including kidneys. The results so far do not suggest that failure to request is a serious problem in England. A much more significant reason for the loss of suitable organs was refusal by relatives. We are carrying out a programme of national publicity to address this problem.

Head Lice

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the incidence of head louse infection in British schools for each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 26 April at columns *293-94*.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the percentage of those waiting for non-urgent operations who wait longer than *(a)* one year, *(b)* six months and *(c)* two years in Leeds Eastern health authority and Leeds Western health authority;

(2) what has been the rise in the number of people waiting for non-urgent operations as a percentage and as a number in *(a)* Leeds Eastern health authority, *(b)* Leeds Western health authority and *(c)* the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is given in the table.

In-patient waiting lists (surgical specialties)

	Total number at 31 March	*percentage change*	*At 31 March, percentage of cases on list waiting:*		
			6-12 months	*12-23 months*	*over 24 months*
Leeds Eastern					
1989	5,165	+0·1	18·2	17·9	8·0
1990	5,169		16·8	17·6	9·0
Leeds Western					
1989	4,596	−8·0	21·1	17·1	9·5
1990	4,230		23·5	14·1	9·0
England					
1989	595,033	+1·3	22·8	17·1	12·4
1990	602,850		23·3	12·3	10·5

Since 1979 the number of in-patients treated in all specialties has increased by 25 per cent. in Leeds Eastern, by 41 per cent. in Leeds Western and by nearly 25 per cent. in England as a whole.

For information for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Romanian Children

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Romanian children adopted or fostered by British people are currently in the care of local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We know of no such children who are currently in the care of local authorities.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received any representations from residential or nursing home owners with respect to the European Commission's social action programme, Council document 8073/90, about the organisation of working time.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are aware of the independent sector's concern about this directive, and have received comments on behalf of private hospital, nursing home and residential care home proprietors.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the average number of weekly working hours of the average home-worker including overtime in *(a)* local authority residential homes, *(b)* private residential homes and *(c)* private nursing homes;

(2) what is his estimate of the number of employees in residential and nursing homes who *(a)* have a minimum rest period of 11 consecutive hours in every 24 hours, *(b)* work two consecutive full-time night shifts, *(c)* work more than eight night hours of every 24 hours, on average, and *(d)* have regular, free health assessments when working on night shifts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has now assessed the implications of the European Commission's social action programme concerning the organisation of working time, Council document 8073/90, for the level of staffing ratio, organisation and running of residential and nursing homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A draft EC directive on the organisation of working time is currently under negotiation in Brussels. The Government are considering the implications of the directive for the United Kingdom.

Whitley Council

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the total number of staff involved in servicing the General Whitley Council and its committees, the annual cost of running the council, and the number of national health service staff covered by the General Whitley Council; and if he will give similar figures for the review bodies on doctors' and dentists' remuneration and nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The General Whitley Council is responsible for negotiating conditions of service for some 937,000 staff in the national health service, including 590,000 whose pay is covered by the review bodies. Servicing the work of the council and its committees involves 9·5 whole-time equivalent staff of the Department at an approximate annual cost of £153,000. The pay of the non-review body staff is negotiated by the various functional Whitley councils and related negotiating bodies.

Questions about the servicing of the review bodies are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to control campylobacter infection to prevent infection entering kitchens and food manufacturing premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Attention to good food hygiene practice will help to prevent all forms of foodborne infection.

Guidance for the consumer is given in the leaflet "Food Safety: A Guild from Her Majesty's Government" copies of which are available in the Library. Food manufacturers are responsible for the microbiological safety of their processes. This responsibility is clearly set out in the Food Safety Act 1990.

Childbirth

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the sample of 173,000 births in England in 1988-89 referred to in his answer of 22 October, *Official Report*, columns *33-34*, which were used to estimate induction rates, instrumental delivery rates and Caesarean section rates were a random sample of births in all regions and districts of England in each month of 1988-89; and how many of these records did not have information recorded about *(a)* onset of labour or *(b)* method of delivery.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The 173,000 records were those submitted by health authorities with method of delivery and method of onset of labour recorded. Due to teething problems with new data collections some health authorities were unable to submit a fully coded record for each delivery. The available data are thus not a random sample, but checks showed that the information given in the answer of 22 October at columns *33-34* was consistent with earlier figures.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Research Projects

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he has received from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the Hanham report on the costing of university research projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Universities have responded positively to the Hanham report, improving their cost-recovery procedures in the light of its recommendations. In the light of experience and with the assistance of other parties concerned, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is further developing the costing principles for research projects.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to assist local education authorities to meet their redefined duties to provide speech therapy for children who need to learn to communicate by speech, following the 1989 Court of Appeal ruling in R *v.* Lancashire county council ex parte CM.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department's circular 22/89, which was published on 29 September 1989, reminds local

education authorities that in the case to which my hon. Friend refers, the Court of Appeal ruled that speech therapy could be considered either educational or non-educational provision. However, the ruling does not diminish health authorities' general responsibilities under the National Health Service Reorganisation Act 1973 to provide speech therapy, and it does not mean that education authorities are under any legal obligation to fund speech therapy.

Agriculture and Food Research

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the amount of money his Department gave to fund *(a)* arable crops research, *(b)* animal health, *(c)* animal physiology and genetics, *(d)* engineering research, *(e)* food research, *(f)* grassland and environmental research, *(g)* horticultural research and *(h)* plant science research at Agricultural and Food Research Council institutes since 1980; and what are his estimates for 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department funds the research councils, including the Agricultural and Food Research Council, through grants in aid from the science budget. It is in general for councils to decide how to spend their total budgets.

The council has provided the following figures for expenditure of funds received from the science budget on the categories of research listed in the question for financial years 1987-88 to 1990-91, and for estimated expenditure in 1991-92 and 1992-93:

£s Million

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Arable Crops	6·0	7·6	7·4	7·2	7·9	7·8
Animal Health	3·6	4·0	8·8	9·5	11·1	10·1
Animal Physiology and Genetics	6·3	6·7	8·1	8·8	9·6	9·3
Engineering	0·8	0·8	1·1	1·3	1·5	1·4
Food	6·2	6·5	7·9	9·1	14·8	10·5
Grassland and Environmental	2·2	3·6	3·6	4·4	3·2	3·1
Horticulture	2·9	2·7	3·1	2·8	3·2	3·2
Plant Science	6·9	6·2	6·8	7·8	9·2	8·7
Total	34·9	38·1	46·8	50·9	60·5	54·1

It is not possible, without disproportionate work, to provide strictly comparable figures for the years 1980-81 to 1986-87 because of the major restructuring of AFRC institutes which has taken place and which is still continuing. In those years, the council spent science budget funds as follows:

million

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Animals	11·0	13·8	13·9	14·0
Arable Crops	8·7	9·7	12·5	18·4
Horticulture	2·1	3·4	6·0	
Engineering	1·1	1·6	1·0	0·6
Food Science	2·6	3·2	2·0	3·2
Total	25·5	31·7	35·4	36·2

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Plant Breeding	3·4	2·8	4·8
Crop Protection	4·6	4·5	5·9
Soils and Crop Nutrition	2·6	2·7	2·4
Crop Production	6·4	6·4	7·8
Animal Breeding	4·5	3·0	4·0
Animal Disease	4·9	4·1	4·1
Animal Nutrition	1·6	1·6	2·4
Animal Production	0·5	2·2	2·9
Food	3·3	5·3	5·5
Total	31·8	32·6	39·8

All figures represent the amounts paid to institutes for both recurrent and capital costs, including payments for major restructuring projects. Grants made to bodies other than AFRC institutes (such as universities) and central funds which have been used to support institute research (central administration, superannuation and so on) are not included.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average cost of a place in *(a)* primary education, *(b)* secondary education, excluding sixth forms, *(c)* sixth forms and *(d)* further education.

Mr. Eggar: The latest available information is for financial year 1988-89. Net institutional expenditure per pupil in nursery and primary schools, for which separate figures are not collected centrally, was some £1,100. For secondary schools, for which figures for sixth form and other pupils are not collected separately, it was some £1,690. Net institutional expenditure per student in local education authority maintained establishments of further education, excluding polytechnics, was some £2,860.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for what reasons grant-maintained schools are excluded from the requirement of section 26(9) of the Education Reform Act relating to duty to comply with a parent's preference as to school and the circumstances in which no prejudice is taken to arise.

Mr. Eggar: The provisions made in section 26(9) of the Education Reform Act relate to the Education Act 1980, which does not apply to grant-maintained schools.

Under section 83(1) of the 1988 Act the governing body of a grant-maintained school is required to fix as the number of pupils it intends to admit in any school year a number which is at least equal to the approved admission number.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science under which separate headings grant-maintained schools may apply for special purpose

grant; in each case, what criteria or formulae are applied in determining the level of such grant; and what is the total sum available for such grant for 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: Schools may apply for four separate types of special purpose grant: SPG (development) or SPG(D); SPG (premises) or SPG(P); SPG (restructuring) or SPG(R); and SPG (VAT) or SPG(V).

SPG(D) is intended to mirror what the school might have received via educational support grant and local education authority training grants scheme towards the cost of management training, staff development and the implementation of the national curriculum and assessment arrangements. In 1991-92 each school will be entitled to receive up to £42 full-year equivalent per pupil.

SPG(P) is intended to meet the costs of premises insurance. It is payable up to a limit of £6,000 or 50 per cent. of the school's insurance premium, whichever is the lower figure.

SPG(R) is available to help with the costs of redundancy payments and other staff restructuring, where it can be demonstrated that the staffing changes are in the interests of the efficient operation of the school.

SPG(V) compensates for the payment of VAT on supplies and services, which grant-maintained schools, unlike local education authorities, may not claim back. It is available at a rate of 2·5 per cent. of a school's annual maintenance grant, with an appropriate deduction in the case of ex-county schools which on incorporation become eligible to receive rate relief as charities.

The total amount of special purpose grant available in 1991-92 will depend upon the number of grant-maintained schools in operation. That figure cannot be accurately predicted.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what special purpose grant payments have been made, or approved, under each heading to grant-maintained schools so far; and how much this represents per pupil.

Mr. Eggar: The only firm information available is for the financial year 1989-90. The total payments were:

1989-90	*Total payments (£)*
SPG(D)	183,956
SPG(P)	27,736
SPG(R)	11,823
SPG(V)	231,313
Total	454,828

Taking pupil numbers as at January 1990, these payments in total represent a full-year equivalent payment of £59·35 per pupil.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to amend rule 909 to reduce the circumstances in which school playing fields may be sold.

Mr. Fallon: The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981, Statutory Instrument No. 909, prescribe minimum standards for playing field provision at maintained schools. The forthcoming review of the school premises regulations will cover the appropriateness of these standards in the context of current and future educational practice, and of securing better use of school grounds.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number and size of school playing fields that have been sold in the past 11 years.

Mr. Fallon: The information needed to provide the estimate requested by the hon. Member is not available centrally.

Physical Education Colleges

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many physical education colleges have closed in the past 11 years;

(2) if he will make it his policy to take the steps necessary to transfer responsibility for the closure of physical education colleges to his Department.

Mr. Fallon: As no freestanding colleges of physical education are still in existence, the question of responsibility for their closure does not arise. Nonington college, Kent, has closed; most of the other physical education colleges have merged with other establishments to become part of polytechnics or colleges of higher education. These institutions now offer PE as a subject specialism within their initial teacher training courses (secondary phase). Anstey college, Birmingham, was absorbed into Birmingham polytechnic in which PE is no longer an option within initial teacher training for the secondary phase.

London Schools Athletic Championships

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the reasons the London schools athletic championships did not take place this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have received no representations on this issue. However, I understand that the London schools athletic championships were not held this year because the schools involved were unable to make the necessary commitment to this event. As a result, the London Schools Athletic Association has decided to organise next year's championships on an inter-borough basis.

Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many schoolchildren and young persons participated in sporting activities in 1979 and 1989; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the average amount of time devoted to sport and recreation in schools.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not available centrally. The Government fully recognise the importance of sport in schools. The national curriculum working group on physical education has been asked to take account of the contribution which competitive sport can make to the curriculum as a whole. The group's interim report is due to be submitted by the end of the year.

Teacher Training

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide the latest available estimated cost to train a teacher.

Mr. Fallon: In polytechnics and colleges the estimated annual mean level of public funding per student enrolled on education courses in 1989-90 was around £3,500. The same figure was taken by the Universities Funding Council as the maximum at which it would fund each university undergraduate teacher training place in its recent bidding exercise.

Teacher Appraisal

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the outcome of the recent consultations on school teacher appraisal.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: *[pursuant to his reply, 7 December 1990, c. 213]:* I am grateful for the full and considered responses to the consultation which my predecessor launched in September.

Most respondents wanted appraisal to be a duty on employers—and a duty and an entitlement for teachers. I agree. Appraisal will enhance the professional skills of teachers, and hence the education of their pupils. It should become part of the everyday working life of teachers, as in other occupations. Appraisal will assist teachers to realise their potential and carry out their duties more effectively. It affords parents an assurance of the quality of the teaching which their children will receive.

Accordingly my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I intend to introduce regulations to require local education authorities and the governors of grant-maintained schools to arrange for the regular appraisal of all teachers whom they employ. We shall need to bring that requirement in gradually because the teacher force in England and Wales is 440,000 strong. But my target is that every teacher now in service should have had his first appraisal by the end of the 1994-95 school year.

The recommendations of the national steering group on the aims of appraisal and on the broad components of the appraisal process command wide support. The regulations and the circular which will accompany them will build on that foundation. Appraisal will take place on a regular two-year cycle. At its heart will lie an observation by a senior colleague of the teacher's work in the classroom. This will be followed by an interview in which the appraiser will discuss the appraisee's professional development with him, and set targets for future action.

I envisage that the regulations will enable the chairman of the school governors to see on request the targets set for teachers at the school. Disciplinary procedures will remain separate but may draw on appraisal records. In advising governing bodies on the exercise of their responsibilities for remuneration head teachers will be able to draw on relevant information from appraisal, along with other factors.

I consider that the national steering group substantially overestimated the cost of introducing appraisal. I shall support expenditure of £10 million on appraisal in 1991-92, and of at least £10 million in 1992-93. Final decisions about 1992-93 and later years will be taken in due time.

My Department has today invited the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions to consider an amendment to teachers' conditions of service which would oblige teachers to participate in appraisal with a framework prescribed by the regulations. I shall, as required by section 49 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, consult again before making the regulations.

DEFENCE

RAF Flying Accidents

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and circumstances of the flying accident involving a Royal Air Force Jaguar aircraft on 12 September.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On 12 September 1990, a Jaguar aircraft from RAF Coltishall on a routine training sortie crashed into a sandbank in the Solway firth. Tragically, the pilot was killed.

A board of inquiry has been convened, and a summary of its findings will be published.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and circumstances of the flying accident involving a Royal Air Force Tornado aircraft on 18 October.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On 18 October 1990, a RAF Tornado aircraft crashed while approaching to land at Tabuk air force base in Saudi Arabia. The aircrew both ejected, but suffered major injuries.

A board of inquiry has been convened, and a summary of its findings will be published.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1985 external stores have been inadvertently released from Royal Air Force aircraft in flight.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Eight, excluding occasions where weapons were released inadvertently within a weapons range danger area.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and circumstances of the flying accident involving a Royal Air Force Jaguar aircraft on 13 November.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On 13 November 1990, a RAF Jaguar aircraft on a low-level training flight flew into a ridge in the desert in Saudi Arabia, some 100 miles south of Bahrain. Tragically, the pilot was killed.

A board of inquiry has been convened, a summary of its findings will be published.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature and circumstances of the flying accident involving a Royal Air Force Harrier aircraft on 17 October.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On 17 October 1990, a RAF Harrier aircraft experienced what appeared to be engine problems shortly after take-off from Alborg air force base in Denmark. The pilot ejected and the aircraft crashed into a field. The pilot suffered minor injuries.

A board of inquiry has been convened, and a summary of its findings will be published.

Low Flying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will maintain central records of confirmed infringements of United Kingdom low-flying system regulations by foreign aircrews.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if foreign aircrew found to have infringed the regulations governing the United Kingdom low-flying system are subject to disciplinary proceedings under the Air Force Act 1955.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying movements were booked in low-flying area 17 in 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not the general practice to publish such information relating to individual low-flying areas.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those low-flying areas where a limit is imposed on the number of aircraft permitted within the area at any one time; and what was the date of introduction of the limit in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Limits on the number of aircraft allowed at any one time in low-flying areas 7 and 17 were introduced in 1987 and in low-flying area 12 earlier this year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Royal Air Force pilots are permitted to fly low level over the United Kingdom while wearing a patch over one eye.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the special circumstances in which Royal Air Force aircrew may be authorised to fly at heights less than those set out in the United Kingdom military low flying handbook, as provided in section 51*(b)* of the Air Force Act 1955, and set out in Joint Services Publication 318.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have nothing to add to the reply which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) gave to the hon. Member on 19 April 1989 at column *113*.

Gower Peninsula

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now reply to the letter sent to him on 12 October by the hon. Member for Gower regarding the potential hazards associated with leisure flying and low-flying aircraft over the Gower peninsula.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have written to the hon. Member.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will request from the French Minister of Defence a full list of all weapons, aircraft, missiles and munitions supplied by French companies to Iraq prior to 2 August 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am satisfied that we are making appropriate inquiries about Iraqi military equipment.

Sri Lankans (Training)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sri Lankan personnel have been on military training courses in the United Kingdom in each of the last four years; what advisory visits have been made in the last four years under the auspices of the directorate of military assistance overseas: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Specific details on foreign students attending military training courses in the United Kingdom are normally confidential between the Governments concerned. I can, however, confirm that members of the Sri Lankan armed forces have attended a number of courses in the United Kingdom given by the three services. No advisory visits under the auspices of the directorate of military assistance overseas have been made to Sri Lanka in the past four years.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Late Sittings

35. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has any plans to reduce the amount of business taken by the House after midnight; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: In an ideal world the House would not often need to meet after midnight and I will consider any ideas as to how we might achieve this. However, any move towards this ideal while still securing the passage of business will require the co-operation and self-discipline of all hon. Members.

Shopping Facilities

36. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration is being given to the provision of shopping facilities for essential goods for the benefit of hon. Members and staff within the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor: A small general shop run by the Refreshment Department and open to all Members and staff of the House is to be established in phase 1 of the new parliamentary buildings.

POLIS

37. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will ensure that all Members' offices have direct access to POLIS.

Mr. MacGregor: All right hon. and hon. Members are able to access POLIS through the Library's terminals. The Library will also arrange for any Member to have direct access to the POLIS service in his own office, so long as his computer equipment is compatible. I am now studying the fourth report of the Services Committee of last Session, on computer services for members, which recommended the installation of a new cable to facilitate Members' access to POLIS and other data services.

Procedural Changes

38. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he intends any review of the way in which Parliament manages its own affairs.

Mr. MacGregor: Significant changes in the management and decision-making structures of the House have been proposed in the report on "House of Commons Services", which was prepared for the House of Commons Commission by a team led by Sir Robin Ibbs, and was published on 28 November as House of Commons paper 38 of this Session. My immediate concern, after consulting the House, will be to ensure the implementation of the main proposals in that report.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will consider taking steps to include a note of the total number of oral questions submitted to any one Department at the foot of the questions listed on the Order Paper.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so. But if my hon. Friend wishes to pursue the matter he might care to raise it with the Procedure Committee which may shortly begin an inquiry into all aspects of parliamentary questions.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many oral questions were tabled for answer by the *(a)* Secretary of State for Scotland on 21 November, *(b)* Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 22 November and *(c)* Secretary of State for Wales on 3 December.

Mr. MacGregor: The number is as follows:

Oral questions tabled

	Number
The Secretary of State for Scotland	51
The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	31
The Secretary of State for Wales	28

ENERGY

Electricity Industry (Coal Supply)

3. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss future contracts with the electricity industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Disconnections

5. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussion he has had with the new power companies as to the policy they will follow before any cut-offs of power will take place for the non-payment of electricity bills.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In recognition that some consumers may experience genuine difficulties paying their bills, the licences issued to the public electricity suppliers have strengthened the protections against disconnection offered to such consumers. The Director General of Electricity Supply is responsible for overseeing the implementation of these safeguards.

Aberthaw Power Station

7. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future of Aberthaw power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry. However, the future of Aberthaw power station is a matter for National Power.

Renewable Energy

10. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for the encouragement of wind energy sources.

Mr. Moynihan: I intend to make provision reserved for wind energy projects in an order under the non-fossil fuel obligation next year. My Department is pursuing an expanding programme of research, development and demonstration on wind energy in collaboration with industry.

Energy Efficiency

14. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress is being made by the new ministerial group on energy efficiency in devising public sector energy-saving initiatives.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The ministerial group on energy efficiency is working to spread energy efficiency practices throughout the public sector by providing encouragement, advice and technical guidance and by good example.

Electricity Prices

15. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much domestic electricity prices have increased since April 1987; and if he will consider improvement to the arrangements for the protection of electricity consumers to enable effective monitoring of price changes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Domestic electricity prices have risen in real terms by less than 1 per cent. a year since April 1987. The Director General of Electricity Supply has statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of electricity consumers on a range of issues including prices.

Dounreay

16. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the future of Dounreay.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the former Secretary of State for Energy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), on 21 July 1988.

Unleaded Petrol

17. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the percentage of petrol retailing outlets in the United Kingdom selling unleaded petrol; and what are the comparable figures in other members of the European Community.

Mr. Moynihan: The United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association estimates that at the end of September 1990, 98 per cent. of the filling stations in the United Kingdom sold premium unleaded petrol. Comparable figures in the European Community were West Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg 100 per cent., Denmark 85 per cent., Italy 64 per cent., Ireland 50 per cent., France 40 per cent., Spain 19 per cent., Greece 11 per cent. and Portugal 4 per cent.

23. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what market share was taken by unleaded petrol in 1989 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other European Community countries.

Mr. Moynihan: The market share of unleaded petrol increased rapidly in the United Kingdom during 1989—from 4 per cent. in January to 28 per cent. by December, an average of 19 per cent. for that year. The United Kingdom share has subsequently increased to 38 per cent. in October this year.

The United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association estimates that in 1989 the market share of unleaded petrol in other European Community countries was as follows: West Germany 59 per cent., Denmark 57 per cent., Netherlands 37 per cent., Luxembourg 21 per cent., Belgium 19 per cent. Eire 7 per cent., France and Italy 2 per cent. and Spain and Portugal 0·5 per cent. Sales of unleaded petrol in Greece were negligible.

Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing

18. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of Nuclear Electric regarding the company's policy on reprocessing spent nuclear fuel.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman regularly to discuss a variety of issues.

United Kingdom Continental Shelf

19. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many exploration and appraisal wells had been drilled on the United Kingdom continental shelf by the end of November.

Mr. Moynihan: The figure to the end of November is not yet available. Up to 25 November, 195 new exploration and appraisal wells had been started in the United Kingdom continental shelf since the beginning of this year, already the highest annual figure since United Kingdom continental shelf activity began in 1964.

Uranium

20. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the world's resources of uranium.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department does not make an independent assessment of the world's resources of uranium. Regular estimates are, however, published by a number of bodies and I refer my hon. Friend to the 1990 edition of the OECD/IAEA publication "Uranium Resources, Production and Demand". This indicates that known and estimated reserves are expected to be sufficient for about 75 to 175 years.

Public Buildings (Energy Conservation)

21. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of schools, clinics and other public buildings is commissioned, designed, built and put into use without an energy use and conservation evaluation being made.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is not held centrally.

Energy Technology Support Unit

11. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will increase the funding of the energy technology support unit.

Mr. Moynihan: The energy technology support unit provides programme management for my Department's renewable energy R and D programme and part of its energy efficiency programme. Provision for both these programmes next year has been increased with a consequent increase in funding for the energy technology support unit.

Electricity Privatisation

22. **Mr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of pre-registration for the sale of the 12 regional electricity companies.

Mr. Wakeham: By midnight on 14 November 1990 approximately 7·3 million applications to register had been received by the electricity share information office.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is his estimate of the percentage of shares in each of the 12 regional electricity companies held by residents of the home region of each company;

(2) what is his most up-to-date estimate of the numbers of applicants to be shareholders in the 12 regional electricity companies resident in the franchise area served by each company.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is not available in the form requested.

Offshore Installations (Safety)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what exemptions he plans to propose to European law on offshore safety in respect of British installations after 1992.

Mr. Moynihan: None.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department does not itself provide an occupational health service for its employees. Along with all other civil service departments and agencies, my Department has access to the services of the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully

qualified occupational health professionals, including doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom.

The total number of employees in my Department was 1,067 at 1 December 1990.

Offshore Oil Industry

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress he made in helping to promote the United Kingdom offshore oil industry during his recent visit to south America.

Mr. Moynihan: During my visit to south America in October to promote the export interests of the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry I met Government Ministers and senior oil company personnel in both Mexico and Brazil, where I also attended the Rio oil and gas show to lend my support to the British companies exhibiting there and to deliver a paper on offshore safety. I hope that my visit will lead to greater opportunities for British industry to win export orders in these markets.

EMPLOYMENT

Pentobarbitone

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Health and Safety Executive has examined working practices involving the use of pentobarbitone; and if he will issue guidelines concerning its safe use.

Mr. Forth: No studies of working practices specifically involving the use of pentobarbitone have been undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive. Existing statutory provisions, and guidance under those provisions, are comprehensive and there are no plans to issue specific guidelines for this substance.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Jackson: The Department of Employment is served by the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals including doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom.

Working Hours

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what restrictions on working hours *(a)* during the day and *(b)* during the night are contained in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places a number of general duties on employers, including

"the provision and maintenance of plant and safe systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risk to health".

Working time arrangements in so far as they affect health and safety adversely are subject to this general duty.

Residential Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 which apply to workers in residential and nursing homes.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 does not distinguish between workers in one type of premise or another. Therefore, all the provisions of the Act which apply to workers generally apply equally to workers in residential and nursing homes.

New Businesses

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new businesses have been set up since 1981 in *(a)* Amber Valley and *(b)* the east midlands.

Mr. Forth: The information requested, based on VAT registration data, is given in the table. Early indications for 1990 from data collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are that in the United Kingdom as a whole there continues to be a substantial net increase.

VAT registrations, deregistrations and net change: end-1981 to end-1989

	Registrations	*Deregistrations*	*Net change (percentage)*
Amber Valley (local authority district)	2,900	2,400	19·3
East midlands	104,900	83,100	23·8

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many recipients of the disability working allowance will be working for *(a)* between 16 and 24 hours and *(b)* 24 hours or more a week.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that once the benefit is established about 50,000 people will receive disability working allowance at any given point. We expect that about a quarter of these will be working fewer than 24 hours a week.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people would gain if the disability living allowance were to include *(a)* a diet component and *(b)* a heating component for those disabled people who incur extra costs.

Mr. Scott: The numbers who might gain from changes to the proposed disability living allowance would depend on the conditions of entitlement. Very substantial numbers of those people who have extra costs associated with either diet or heating are already receiving help through the existing disability costs benefits and more will do so with the introduction of the new lower rates of the disability living allowance.

The proposed mobility and care components will deliver extra resources to people with a wide range of needs in addition to care and mobility.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many *(a)* single people living with their parents, *(b)* single people living in their own home, *(c)* married people without children and *(d)* married people with children will receive disability working allowance; and if he will estimate the average weekly payment for each group *(a)* to *(d)*.

Mr. Scott: Estimates of the likely case load of disability working allowance can be only tentative. On this basis, we estimate that about half the people who get DWA will be single and half will have a partner. Around half the single claimants will be living in the household of their parents or in the household of another person. About a third of recipients will have children and most of these will have partners. We estimate that the average payment will be a

little under £35 a week, but it is not possible to estimate average payments for different catetories of recipients with confidence.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the increase in expenditure in gross and net terms if the capital limit for the disability working allowance of £8,000 was *(a)* removed altogether, *(b)* raised to £24,000 and *(c)* raised to £16,000; and how many people would become entitled to disability working allowance as a result.

Mr. Scott: Given the small numbers involved and the uncertainty about the characteristics of this group, it is not possible to estimate with confidence either the gross or net cost of raising or removing the upper limit.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index.

Mr. Jack: I regret that this information is not available. The Department is a subscriber to the Government supply index (GSI), and we are considering how we might develop our use of this system to give us improved information. The GSI has proved useful in promoting value-for-money awareness in the Department, but to date, limited directly attributable savings have been achieved.

Pensions

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of uprating the basic state pension by £13 for a single person and £20 for a couple.

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of uprating the retirement pension in this way would be approximately £6 billion. There would also be an additional loss to the national insurance fund of £1 billion as a result of the consequential rise in contribution thresholds and limits. Such an increase implies a rise in the national insurance contributions paid by an employee on average earnings of approximately £2·78 per week and £5·34 for his employer.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, *Official Report*, 21 November, column *131*, if he will now tabulate figures for basic retirement pension applications and awards in 1989 and in 1979, showing how many applications were received in each year; and how many were *(a)* turned down and *(b)* awarded at less than the full rate of basic retirement pension, due to (i) insufficient contributions, (ii) receipt of another benefit, (iii) deferral and (iv) other reasons.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table. Figures are not available on the number of instances where there was no entitlement to retirement pension, where the claimant chose to defer his award or where the award was later reduced because of an overlapping benefit.

A *Date (6 months to)*	*B* *Total claims*	*C* *Total awards*	*D* *Number at less than full rate*
November 1979	371,938	347,000	39,520
March 1989	317,011	244,940	50,340

Note: Instances where the payment of retirement pension was reduced because of an overlapping benefit are included as full awards in column C.

Industrial Disablement Benefit

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date hard metal disease was prescribed for industrial disablement benefit purposes; if he will list the medical conditions which are treated as pneumoconiosis for industrial disablement benefit purposes, and in relation to each disease when it was first so treated; and in relation to the lung conditions which are treated as pneumoconiosis for industrial disablement benefit purposes, what publicity has been issued by the Department of Social Security to inform potential claimants about their potential eligibility.

Mr. Scott: Fibrosis of the lung caused by dust from hard metal is covered by the definition of pneumoconiosis which, for the purposes of industrial injuries disablement benefit, includes fibrosis of the lungs due to silica dust, asbestos dust or other dust. This definition was first included in the coal mining industry (pneumoconiosis) compensation scheme under the Workmen's Compensation Act 1943. Information is available in a number of departmental leaflets; leaflet N13 in particular refers to lung diseases caused by some dusts and fibres.

Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether his Department has any plans to embark on on-going research work to determine the actual and potential costs of disability.

Mr. Scott: The OPCS surveys, and the family expenditure survey (FES) follow-up survey published earlier this year, have provided us with an unprecedented amount of information about both the actual and the potential costs of disability. We have no intention of commissioning further research at this stage, although we will keep the position under review.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children would receive each of the two mobility components of the disability living allowance if the lower age limit of five years was *(a)* removed altogether or *(b)* reduced to two years; and what the total expenditure would be in each case.

Mr. Scott: The number of potential beneficiaries from a reduction in the lower age limit for the mobility component cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. Our estimates, based on analyses of the OPCS disability surveys, are that the abolition of the age limit would bring perhaps an additional 15,000 children on to the higher level of the mobility component and an additional 10,000 on to the lower level. The total cost would be about £35 million a year. A reduction in the age limit to two years would be likely to bring on slightly lower numbers of children, with a cost of about £30 million a year.

Medical Reports (Benefits)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what statutory authority people can be refused sight of medical reports on their person when such reports are obtained by his Department in respect of applications for discretionary benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no statutory authority. Medical reports are given in confidence and whether they can be released or not is governed by principles of common law.

Coal Workers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* shotsmen and *(b)* shotfirers who formerly worked in the coal industry have been tested for the effects of nitrogen oxide; of those tested, how many have received compensation; and if he will supply figures for each coalfield area in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available, but on 1 April 1989, some 20 people were estimated to be receiving industrial injuries disablement benefit because of poisoning by oxides of nitrogen.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any persons suffering from Dupuytren's contracture as a direct result of employment in the coal industry are entitled to claim compensation.

Mr. Scott: I believe that this question relates to the condition of Dupuytren's contracture in which bands of increased fibrous tissue in the palm of the hand may result in a progressive curling over of one or more fingers. There is no firm evidence that this condition arises from any form of employment. It is not therefore recognised under the industrial injuries scheme as a prescribed disease.

Social Security Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what explanation he offers to persons willing to serve on social security appeal tribunals but whom he decides not to reappoint; what right of appeal against such refusal to reappoint exists; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what opportunities to attend training courses have been offered in each year since 1979 to members of the Leeds social security appeal tribunal; how many members have attended *(a)* all training courses and *(b)* no training courses in each of the last five years; and what importance he places on attendance at training courses when deciding reappointments to the tribunal;

(3) how many persons he has appointed in each year since 1979 to the Leeds social security appeal tribunal; what is the normal term of office; in how many cases since 1979 he has reappointed persons for further terms; and in how many cases since 1979 he has declined to reappoint a person who is willing to continue service;

(4) what reports he has received in the past five years about complaints made by members of the Leeds social security appeal tribunal concerning the conduct of hearings.

Miss Widdecombe: The responsibility for the appointment of members of social security appeal tribunals lies with the president of social security appeal tribunals and medical appeal tribunals, His Honour Judge Derek Holden, who is appointed by the Lord Chancellor. He has, however, provided me with the following information.

Tribunal members normally hold office for three years at a time, but the president may, at any time, terminate the appointment of any member. There is no right of appeal against the decision not to reappoint a person to a panel of members.

Since the president's office was created in 1984, training courses have been available to members of Leeds social security tribunal in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989. Further courses are being arranged for 1991. Training records are kept for individual members but are not collated. Availability for training courses is regarded as an important factor when considering reappointments.

The number of persons appointed as members of the panel for Leeds social security appeal tribunal since 1979 is as follows:

	Number
1979	5
1980	1
1981	1
1982	2
1983	6
1984	1
1985	1
1986	7
1987	7
1988	2
1989	—
1990	—

The number of members reappointed to the panel for Leeds social security appeal tribunal is available only from 1986:

	Number
1986	8
1987	1
1988	—
1989	2
1990	9

The number of members not reappointed to the panel for Leeds social security appeal tribunal is available only from 1989:

	Number
1989	—
1990	5

During the past five years no complaints from members have been received by the president concerning the conduct of hearings of Leeds social security tribunals.

Sexual Equality

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that men and women are treated equally in all social security matters.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are committed to the principle of equal treatment for men and women. Certain social security issues are exempted under European law from the general rule of equal treatment.

Child Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional cost in 1991-92 of a 10p increase in allowances for dependent children under income support, family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that the net overall cost of increasing all child premiums by 10p for all four income-related benefits would be about £17 million.

Community Charge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to undertake a fundamental review of the operation of the poll tax rebate scheme in 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is conducting a fundamental review of the community charge. Any associated changes in social security arrangements will be considered at the appropriate time.

Earnings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women earn above the national insurance upper earnings limit, divided into those on basic rate and the top rate of tax in 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that in 1991-92 the numbers of employees with earnings above the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions will be as follows:

	Men million	*Women million*
Basic rate income tax	1·7	0·3
Higher rate income tax	1·0	0·1
Total	2·7	0·4

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women earn below the national insurance threshold; and how many are between the upper and lower earnings limits in 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that in 1991-92 about 3 million employees, a quarter of whom will be men, will have earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. It is also estimated that in that year about 16·5 million employees, split equally between men and women, will have earnings that are between the upper and lower earnings limits.

National Insurance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue would be raised by putting national insurance contributions on savings above *(a)* £3,000 and *(b)* £5,000 (i) including pensioners and (ii) excluding pensioners.

Mr. Jack: National insurance contributions are levied only on earned income not on capital.

SCOTLAND

Administrative Costs

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the administrative costs of his Department rose by more or less than the retail prices index in the last financial year.

Mr. Lang: Gross running cost expenditure on Scottish Office administration was 8·3 per cent. higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year. During the same period the retail prices index increased by 7·8 per cent.

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what were his Department's *(a)* best and *(b)* worst purchases made in the current month as measured against the Government's supply index;

(2) what were the 10 worst purchases made by his Department in the month of October as measured against the Government's supply index.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is not a member of the Government supply index.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office complies with the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement (GPA) where appropriate, the Scottish Office is obliged to award relevant contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality. To help to ensure effective compliance with these policies, and in line with guidance from HM Treasury's Central Unit on Purchasing, the Scottish Office has established a central purchasing and supply unit.

Woodland Grant Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the level of grants paid by the Forestry Commission under the woodland grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the scheme's operation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend expects to make an announcement on this matter shortly.

Nature Conservancy Council (Scotland)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to announce the membership of the council of the Nature Conservancy Council (Scotland).

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will announce the membership soon.

A1

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the timing of the upgrading of the A1 road from Musselburgh to Dunbar to dual carriageway standard in the light of his recent announcement on his Department's expenditure plans.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There has been no change in our plans to develop and implement a suitable programme of road improvements for the A1 including the dualling of the route first to Haddington and then on to Dunbar. The necessary preparatory work for this upgrading will continue as planned.

Consultation

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his practice to add hon. Members to the list of consultees to whom Scottish Office consultative documents are issued.

Mr. Lang: My Department takes account of the subject matter and purpose of each consultative document in deciding to whom it should be sent. Right hon. and hon. Members are included where they are likely to have an interest. In appropriate circumstances consultative documents are placed in the Library and the attention of the House is drawn to this. Moreover, media publicity is often given to consultative exercises thus enabling anyone with an interest to obtain copies of documents and submit views.

Firearms (Amendment) Act

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to amend section 19 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 to include measures that are partially or wholly funded by private means; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans to amend section 19 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988.

Public Sector Tenants (Property Purchases)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *205*, he will name the three authorities which have submitted proposals to operate financial incentive schemes to encourage tenants to buy homes in the private sector and which are currently under consideration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* Skye and Lochalsh district council, North East Fife district council and Gordon district council have submitted such proposals.

Scottish Refugee Council

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will respond positively to the grant application by the Scottish Refugee Council to the Scottish Office social work services group; and when he expects to respond.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The Scottish Office and the Home Office jointly made available to the Scottish Refugee Council a three-year grant of £25,000 per annum commencing in 1989-90. The council has applied to the Scottish Office for increased grant in 1991-92. This application is currently being considered along with other competing applications, and a decision is expected by early February 1991.

Mr. Brent Hodgson

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a statement on the progress of the investigation by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland into the case of Mr. Brent Hodgson, a former adult student at the West of Scotland college, Auchincruive, Ayr.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Shellfish

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements are being made or have already been made to protect the environment or the local ecology before the introduction of alien species of shellfish is permitted.

Mr. Curry: It is an offence under section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or which is included in part I of schedule 9 to that Act. Introductions into the wild may be authorised by a licence granted under section 16 and after consultation with the Nature Conservancy Council. These licences may be general or specific and subject to certain conditions. At present general licences permit releases of Pacific oysters (Crassostrea gigas) and Portuguese oysters (Crassostrea angulata). The release of any other species of alien shellfish would require a specific licence. Moreover, all deposits of molluscan shellfish, whether native or non-native, are subject to licensing under the Molluscan Shellfish (Control of Deposit) Order 1974, as varied.

The suitability of alien shellfish for cultivation in our waters is carefully investigated by fisheries department scientists, who take account of the scope for natural recruitment and potential ecological impact. Steps are also taken to ensure that any imported broodstock are free of alien shellfish parasites or diseases. There is no evidence of natural recruitment or ecological harm having arisen from the cultivation of Pacific or Portuguese oysters.

Institute of Food Research

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the research work carried out at the Institute of Food Research at Norwich which is due to be terminated in 1991.

Mr. Gummer: The following projects, identified as being near-market, are due to terminate in 1991:

Utilisation of proteins as functional ingredients in processed food products.

Optimum conditions for maintaining quality in bulked storage of vegetables.

The Ministry's total expenditure on food R and D is rising from £20·3 million in 1990-91 to £21·4 million in 1991-92.

Farm Employment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farm workers were employed in England on a county-by-county basis in June.

Mr. Gummer: The numbers of farmers and farm workers on main agricultural and horticultural holdings are collected each year under the June agricultural and horticultural census. Results at county level are published from each census in the "Farmers and Workers" section of the "Published Statistical Material" (PSM) statement. The latest statement is for 1989 and a copy is being placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Information from the 1990 June agricultural and horticultural census is currently being processed and will become available next year.

Surplus Produce

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement explaining the total sum in the 1991 EEC budget which relates to the storage and sale of surplus produce, including the disposal thereof.

Mr. Curry: The total sum in the 1991 draft EC budget relating to the storage, sale and disposal of agricultural produce is 17,900 million ecu (£12,500 million). Of this sum 9,800 million ecu (£6,800 million) relates to export refunds, 4,900 million ecu (£3,400 million) to storage, 600 million ecu (£400 million) to withdrawals and 2,600 million ecu (£1,800 million) to internal disposal subsidies.

Agricultural Products and Wine

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing the special sales of agricultural products and wine agreed by the EEC in the most recent six-month period for which figures are available; and if he will indicate the sale prices of these items in terms of pence per pound.

Mr. Curry: Special sales of agricultural produce and wine that have taken place or been agreed by the EC in the last six months are shown in the table:

Date	*Destination*	*Commodity*	*Quantity (Tonnes)*	*Price (pence/lb)*
June	Algeria	Wheat	160,800	3·0
June	Morocco	Wheat	122,000	3·0
July	Algeria	Wheat	60,000	3·0
June	Eastern Europe[1]	Rice	500	8·1
July	Eastern Europe[1]	Rice	14,750	7·5
October	Eastern Europe[2]	Rice	3,900	6·1
November	Eastern Europe[2]	Rice	6,440	6·1–6·5
November	USSR	Wheat	1,500,000	1·7
November	USSR	Barley	500,000	2·0
September	Brazil[3]	Beef-Boneless	30,000	25·3
September	Brazil[3]	Beef-Bone in	50,000	17·5

[1] Includes East Germany.
[2] Excludes East Germany.
[3] Sale agreed by EC but not taken up by Brazil.

Dairy Farms

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dairy farms there are in England on a county-by-county basis for the latest available date.

Mr. Gummer: The number of holdings with dairy cows in each English county in June 1989 was as follows:

County	*Number of holdings*
Avon	575
Bedfordshire	59
Berkshire	106
Buckinghamshire	241
Cambridgeshire	62
Cheshire	1,680
Cleveland	84
Cornwall (inc. Isles of Scilly)	1,916
Cumbria	2,430
Derbyshire	1,180
Devon	3,137
Dorset	1,040
Durham	351
Essex	158
Gloucestershire	654
Hampshire	401
Hereford and Worcester	781
Hertfordshire	108
Humberside	218
Isle of Wight	115
Kent	249
Lancashire	1,753
Leicestershire	585
Lincolnshire	246
Greater London	24
Greater Manchester	277
Merseyside	35
Norfolk	313
Northamptonshire	207
Northumberland	205
Nottinghamshire	219
Oxfordshire	298
Shropshire	1,367
Somerset	1,771
Staffordshire	1,626
Suffolk	207
Surrey	177
Sussex East	291
Sussex West	262
Tyne and Wear	34
Warwickshire	369
West Midlands	61
Wiltshire	902
Yorkshire North	1,968
Yorkshire South	233
Yorkshire West	517

Wine

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Southend, East on 20 November, *Official Report*, column *85*, if the rates of export refund for wine fall to be adjusted in respect of the special sales to Poland and other east European nations; and if he will further indicate the prices at which the wine is purchased from EEC sources before the export refund is applied.

Mr. Curry: There are no special arrangements covering the sale of wine, or of EC stocks of wine alcohol, to Poland or other east European nations.

Representative market prices for table wines are published each week in the C series of the *Official Journal*

of the European Communities. The first during the year in question were published in C.113 of 4 May 1989 (P.4); and the last in C.104 of 26 April 1990 (P.7).

I apologise for an error in my earlier answer. Conversion rates to be applied are:

up to 31 August 1989 one ecu/per cent. vol./hectolitre = £0·0675071/litre

up to 10 January 1990 one ecu/per cent. vol./hectolitre = £0·0701383/litre

up to 11 January 1990 one ecu/per cent. vol./hectolitre = £0·0704335/litre.

The conversion rates assume table wine at 10 per cent. alcohol by volume.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are currently employed in the farm and countryside service of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: On 3 December 1990 there were 1,637 staff employed in the farm and countryside service of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

Borrowing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total liabilities of United Kingdom agriculture including borrowings by agricultural landlords and farmers, but excluding borrowing for private purposes, for 1989 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Information on the total liabilities of United Kingdom agriculture relates to December in each year. No figures are available for 1990. A forecast for 1989 is published in table 3.1 of the 1990 edition of "Farm Income in the United Kingdom" and will be updated in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", 1990 edition, to be published in January 1991. A forecast for 1990 will be given in "Farm Income in the United Kingdom", 1991 edition, to be published in April 1990. The level in real terms of total liabilities of United Kingdom agriculture has remained broadly stable since 1983.

Research and Development

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amount of money his Ministry gave to fund *(a)* arable crops research, *(b)* animal health, *(c)* animal physiology and genetics, *(d)* engineering research, *(e)* food research, *(f)* grassland and environmental research, *(g)* horticultural research and *(h)* plant science research at Agriculture and Food Research Council institutes since 1980; and what are his estimates for 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Gummer: My Department has a significant programme of R and D to provide the necessary scientific base for its policy decisions. In 1990-91 this Department will be spending £121 million on R and D, of which some £45 million (37 per cent.) is at the AFRC institutes.

Information in the detailed format requested is available only from 1987-88 onwards and this is provided in table 1. Comparative data for earlier years can be produced only at disproportionate cost. Tables 2 and 3 give details of that information readily available for the earlier years.

The data exclude central administration and superannuation costs provided by MAFF which are used to support AFRC institutes.

MAFF spend on R and D with AFRC institutes—Table 1

£ million

April-March years	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
(a) Arable crops	5·4	3·8	4·3	4·4	4·5
(b) Animal health	5·1	5·1	5·0	6·2	5·3
(c) Animal physiology and genetics	2·3	2·1	2·2	3·2	3·0
(d) Engineering research	3·4	3·4	3·4	3·4	3·1
(e) Food research	6·3	6·6	6·3	5·9	4·7
(f) Grassland and environmental research	7·2	7·4	6·4	6·0	5·2
(g) Horticultural research	6·8	7·6	7·9	7·1	[1]
(h) Plant science research	0·1	0·3	0·5	0·4	0·4
Total	36·6	36·3	36·0	36·6	[1]26·2

[1]Excludes research which will be commissioned directly by MAFF with Horticultural Research International from 1991-92 onwards.

Table 2

£s million

April-March years	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
(a) Animals	10·7	13·8	15·3	15·2
(b) Arable Crops	7·1	10·9	11·8	20·1
(c) Horticulture	5·8	7·5	8·4	
(d) Engineering	2·4	2·8	4·0	4·4
(e) Food Science	2·6	3·7	5·0	5·8
Total	28·6	38·7	44·5	45·5

Table 3

£ million

April—March years	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
(a) Plant Breeding	5·0	5·1	4·4
(b) Crop Protection	7·3	7·1	6·0
(c) Soils and Crop Nutrition	3·7	3·4	2·6
(d) Crop Production	6·6	6·7	5·8
(e) Animal Breeding	1·7	1·8	1·6
(f) Animal Disease	7·1	5·9	5·2
(g) Animal Nutrition	1·6	2·0	1·8
(h) Animal Production	7·1	7·3	5·6
(i) Food	6·0	6·6	6·7
(j) Statistics and Computing	0·8	0·7	0·8
TOTAL	46·9	46·6	40·5

Research Projects

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of research projects which have been identified as near-market for which his Ministry will withdraw funding; how many of these projects have since found funding from industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As I have stated on a previous occasion, a comprehensive list is not available and can be produced only at disproportionate cost. The two lists provide details of projects in the fisheries and food sectors which have been identified as near-market research for which funding by my Department has been, or is being, phased out in line with Government policy. Information is not available on how many of these projects have attracted funding from industry.

List 1

Projects for Termination in 1990

1. Effects of Frozen Storage on quality and processing meat.
2. Carcase characteristics that determine value.
3. Effects of poultry breeding, husbandry, handling and processing on carcase composition and quality.
4. Flavour of cheese, fats, oils and confectionery.
5. Identify off flavours and taints resulting from processing, packaging and storage of cheese, fats, oils, confectionery and beverages.
6. Factors controlling meat restructuring processes.
7. Protein solubilisation and adhesion in reformed meats.
8. Adhesions and cohesion in meat products.
9. Effects of breeding, husbandry and poultry plant operations on the further processing quality of turkey meat.
10. Crystallisation behaviour of triglyceride mixtures in bulk phase and emulsion systems.
11. Temperature and mass change in meat cooking.
12. Electrical stimulation, hot boning and accelerated ageing.
13. Electrical stimulation, hot boning and processing properties of beef, pork and poultry.
14. Industrial development and technology transfer.
15. Optimum conditions for maintaining quality in packaged fruit and vegetables.
16. Use of microbial enzymes for the upgrading of sugar beet.
17. Carcase composition and meat quality in cattle.
18. Carcase composition and meat quality in sheep.
19. Techniques for assessment of carcase composition.
20. Effects of pre-slaughter handling practices on value of carcase and fresh meat.
21. Microbial spoilage of packaged fish and shellfish.
22. Innovation of fish and shellfish products and relevant process technology.
23. Shellfish processing.
24. Textural modification of recovered flesh.
25. Improved chilling and handling of sea fish and farmed fish.
26. Innovation and characterisation of added value products from industrial and waste fish resources and development of relevant new pilot plant processes or existing processes.
27. Improvements in the efficiency of processing fish—smoking.
28. Investigation of chemical/physical methods of reducing the rate of deterioration of bulk stored fish at sea.
29. Assessment of the requirements for the introduction of freezing-at-sea on small fishing vessels.
30. Study of cultured fish in relation to general quality aspects and to their suitability for processing.
31. The efficient use of recovered fish flesh for human consumption.
32. Applications of electronics and physical sensors in fish processing.
33. Plant design—Development of monitoring and control systems.
34. Refrigeration—the design and development of a multipass freezer.
35. Plant design—Energy utilisation in fish processing.
36. Plant design—A study of fundamental principles in the design and development of new smoking processes.
37. Processing machinery—Development of a machine to produce uncoated formed fillets.
38. Processing machinery—Separation of meat from shellfish.

List 2

Projects for termination in 1991

1. Utilisation of proteins as functional ingredients in processed food products.
2. Chemical composition and processing conditions on functional properties of food emulsions.
3. Composition factors and processing conditions of fat in food emulsions.
4. Heat and mass transfer in meat refrigeration.
5. Robotics in meat handling and processing.
6. Meat process engineering.
7. Quality control robotic vision and meat grading by video image analysis and fibre.
8. Production of savoury flavour-enhancing peptides by enzymes.
9. Improve yield and quality of cheese and other fermented dairy products using cultures and enzymes derived from biotechnology programmes at IFR.
10. Packaging techniques for improved storage and display.
11. Optimum conditions for maintaining quality in bulked storage of vegetables.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what he is charging Dr. Harash Narang of the public health laboratory for the supply of cattle heads for BSE testing; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many cattle brains he is supplying to Dr. Harash Narang at the public health laboratory in Newcastle for BSE tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We are supplying Dr. Harash Narang with 10 cattle brains at £50 each. This cost reflects the expenditure incurred by my Department in ensuring the supply of both positive and negative BSE material.

Bankruptcies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has for the number of bankruptcies in the agricultural sector in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Figures for bankruptcies in England and Wales for the agricultural and horticultural sectors over the last five years are as follows:

	Number of bankruptcies	*Percentage of total bankruptcies*
1985	136	2·1
1986	130	1·9
1987	172	2·4
1988	162	2·1
1989	142	1·7

Note: These and related figures were set out in the 9 November issue of "Business Briefing" published by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. The balance sheet for British agriculture remains strong with the value of assets being six times liabilities.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 December 1990

ENERGY

V7 Light Bulbs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the V7 light bulb; whether Her Majesty's Government will be taking any steps to promote its use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The V7 light bulb is an energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamp available in the United States and manufactured to operate at United States voltage levels. My Energy Efficiency Office has examined a range of similar commercially available lamps in the United Kingdom. Compact fluorescent lamps are now becoming generally available in high street shops and supermarkets. They use 75 to 80 per cent. less electricity and last eight times as long as normal light bulbs for which they are suitable as direct replacements. The electricity they save will more than cover their extra initial cost.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many separate individual applicants have applied for shares in the regional electricity companies of England and Wales.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many individuals have made applications for shares in one or more regional electricity company.

Mr. Wakeham: A total of 12·75 million applications have been made for shares in the 12 regional companies share offers. Precise figures are not available at this stage, but the number of application forms is estimated at over 5 million. This is the highest number for any privatisation.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate for each regional electricity company floated, what the breakdown is of *(a)* within franchise area individual shareholders, *(b)* outside franchise area individual shareholders and *(c)* institutional shareholders.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 December 1990, at column *300*.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is yet in a position to state how many applications for shares in one or more regional electricity companies have been received from households involving more than one applicant.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the estimated cost allocated for the use of the TRAP computer programme for the detection of illegal multiple share applications for shares in the electricity flotation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The electricity fraud auditors have set up a number of sophisticated systems for the detection of multiple share applications. The costs will depend on the scale of the work required.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department's purchasing information system does not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on the Department's purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested is as follows:

£'000

	Press advertising	*Television and radio advertising*	*Other advertising and promotion*	*Videos and sound cassettes*[2]
1989-90	892	0	1,000	120
1988-89	2,378	4	1,313	184
1987-88	1,513	0	959	44
1986-87	11,830	17,519	4,501	62
1985-86	1,589	2,212	[1]	49

[1] Expenditure on other advertising and promotion is not available for 1985-86 on a comparable basis.
[2] Includes expenditure on films as well as videos.

THE ARTS

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Renton: My Department's accounting information system does not differentiate between the acquisition and commissioning of goods and services. The Office of Arts and Libraries administration vote totals £1,802,000 in 1990-91, of which about £150,000 will be spent on goods and services.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Renton: There has been expenditure by my Department only on the category "other advertising and promotion". The details for the last five years are as follows:

Year	£
1986-87	Nil
1987-88	13,225
1988-89	6,785
1989-90	1,564
1990-91	658

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Staff

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement pursuant to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's letter, reference TEAH/614/1016 of 5 November to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, on his study of the report commissioned by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and AUT on recruitment and retention of university, academic and academic-related staff.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In agreeing appropriate pay levels for university academic and academic-related staff, the Government regard recruitment and retention as most important factors for consideration. The report referred to by the hon. Member will be taken into account in the context of the 1991 pay settlement. Our examination of the report has concluded that it does not appear to shed any significant new light on the question of staff outflows overseas.

Educational Psychologists

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the numbers of educational psychologists placed in schools with substantial ethnic minority populations who are able to speak the language of that minority for 1985 to 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is not collected centrally. The employment and deployment of educational psychologists is the responsibility of the individual local education authority.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has, for the last five years, on the number of ethnic minority pupils who have stayed on in school after the age of 16 years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is not available centrally.

Multi-faith Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will outline the ways in which multi-faith education is currently being promoted.

Mr. Eggar: Within the framework of the Education Reform Act, the precise content of religious education is a matter for local determination. The changes introduced by the ERA secure the place of Christianity within RE in schools, while taking account of the needs and aspirations of the many people who hold different beliefs. In county schools, RE must be provided in accordance with a locally agreed syllabus drawn up by a conference, convened for that purpose by the LEA and reflecting the principal religious traditions of the area. The ERA requires all new syllabuses to

"reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain".

Teachers (Language Training)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money has been spent in the past five years on the training of teachers in other languages; and if he will give the languages currently being studied by those teachers.

Mr. Fallon: Training costs for individual courses vary between institutions and details are not held centrally. The principal languages other than English being studied include French, German, Spanish, Italian, Welsh, Latin and Greek.

Schools (Annual Grants)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what, for each authority in which there is a grant-maintained school, is the average sum per pupil, in the primary or secondary phases, as appropriate, attributed in the calculations of annual maintenance grants to central services *(a)* for 1989-90 and *(b)* for 1990-91.

Mr. Eggar: This information is given in the table:

Central costs component of annual maintenance grant for grant maintained schools

Local education authority	Per pupil amount (£) 1989-90	Per pupil amount (£) 1990-91
Barnet	186	251
Bedfordshire	203	285
Berkshire	—	247
Birmingham	257	351
Bolton	163	249
Brent	—	380
Buckinghamshire	—	273
Cheshire	241	318
Derbyshire	—	340
Devon	245	389
Dorset	—	245
Dudley	274	354
Gloucestershire	—	234
Hertfordshire	—	225
Hillingdon	—	374
Kensington and Chelsea	—	661
Kent	166	238
Kirklees	218	268
Lancashire	217	269
Leicestershire	—	311
Lincolnshire	222	190
Liverpool	315	193
Northamptonshire	—	242
Shropshire	—	264
Southwark	—	520
Surrey	—	296
Sutton	243	331
Tameside	193	262
Wolverhampton	—	323

Notes:

1. Figures are full-year equivalent for secondary schools. There

are currently no grant-maintained primary schools in operation.
2. Apportionment of costs between school and local education authority level will have changed in some local education authorities between 1989-90 and 1990-91 as a result of the introduction on 1 April 1990 of financial delegation schemes for local management of schools.
3. Figures for Avon, Brent and Hammersmith have yet to be finalised.

Schools (Suspensions)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has, for the last 12 months, on the number of pupils expelled or suspended from primary and secondary schools, by ethnic origin.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is not available centrally.

Bilingual Teachers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of bilingual teachers appointed since 1985 by primary and secondary schools to bridge the language gap between teachers and students or parents.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested in not available centrally.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Eggar: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom. DES does not itself provide occupational health services. The Department currently employs some 2,600 staff.

Food Research

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the staff losses expected at the Institute of Food Research attributable to the withdrawal of Government funding from those projects designated as near market.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A total of 19 posts will be lost by the end of the financial year 1990-91, as a result of the withdrawal of Government funding for "near market" research in 1991-92.

In addition, a further 24 posts will be lost during the same period, because of the realignment of existing Government commissions.

Science and Engineering Research Council

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the amount of the special bonus paid by the Science and Engineering Research Council to its establishment officer in 1989.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Under a scheme for Science and Engineering Research Council employees operative at the time, merit awards were made in February 1990 to the council's establishment officer and to a number of other staff. It is not normal practice to make public the value of payments to individual members of the Science and Engineering Research Council staff.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Eggar: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Eggar: The expenditure figures for advertising and other promotional materials by this Department for the financial years 1986-87 to 1989-90 are provided in the table. Video and cassette costs cannot readily be disaggregated from other advertising and promotion costs. The 1990-91 figure is provisional.

Year	*Press advertising* £000	*Television* £000	*Radio* £000	*Other advertising and promotion* £000
1986-87	532·0	Nil	Nil	533·0
1987-88	280·0	Nil	Nil	1,459·0
1988-89	475·0	Nil	40·0	1,156·0
1989-90	238·0	Nil	11·8	1,150·0
1990-91	1,160·0	1,100·0	Nil	2,115·0

Education Resources

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is taking to ensure that more resources are delegated to schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend is publishing today two draft circulars which will take forward our policies on local management of schools and on more open enrolment. My right hon. and learned Friend is determined to ensure that as much money as is reasonably possible is delegated to schools to manage themselves, and that parents are given the widest possible choice of school at primary as well as at secondary level. Copies of the two circulars are today being placed in the Library of the House.

The draft circular on local management of schools will require LEAs, before 1 April 1993, to hand over to schools

at least 85 per cent. of the potential schools budget, and to determine 80 per cent. of school budgets on the basis of pupil numbers. The draft circular will also require, by 1 April 1994, the extension of delegated management to all small schools and to those special schools that are able and want to manage their own budgets.

The two tables show, where the information has been provided, how each LEA currently performs against these criteria.

The draft circular on more open enrolment sets out our plans to extend that policy to all primary schools for intakes from autumn 1992. This will ensure that schools may not turn away any pupils while they have the space to take them, and so remove artificial limits on parental choice.

1990-91 budgets: percentage of potential schools budget delegated to schools

LEA[3]	*Percentage of PSB*[1] *delegated to schools*	*Total*[2] *discretionary exceptions as percentage of PSB*	*Central administration as percentage of PSB*
1. Bolton	89·10	10·90	2·02
2. Berkshire	87·68	12·32	2·71
3. West Sussex	87·49	12·51	1·95
4. Sefton	87·44	12·56	4·45
5. Sunderland	86·86	13·14	3·10
6. Gloucestershire	86·78	13·22	3·65
7. Northumberland	86·54	13·46	3·10
8. Rotherham	86·13	13·87	3·74
9. Leeds	86·12	13·88	3·87
10. Bradford	86·04	13·96	3·87
11. Hampshire	85·78	14·22	3·34
12. Rochdale	85·74	14·26	2·55
13. Walsall	85·72	14·28	3·37
14. Suffolk	85·66	14·34	2·75
15. Surrey	85·57	14·43	6·17
16. Doncaster	85·45	14·55	2·29
17. Solihull	85·31	14·69	2·49
18. Warwickshire	85·24	14·76	3·90
19. Lincolnshire	85·13	14·87	2·68
20. Liverpool	84·91	15·09	4·07
21. Buckinghamshire	84·88	15·12	4·58
22. Kent	84·87	15·13	3·79
23. Northamptonshire	84·74	15·26	3·69
24. Staffordshire	84·61	15·39	4·51
25. Shropshire	84·60	15·40	2·48
26. Tameside	84·40	15·60	2·47
27. Trafford	84·38	15·62	3·49
28. Salford	84·37	15·63	3·19
29. Barnet	84·36	15·64	5·07
30. Cheshire	84·31	15·69	5·15
31. East Sussex	84·09	15·91	2·42
32. Essex	84·03	15·97	4·11
33. Bedfordshire	84·02	15·98	3·91
34. Dudley	83·98	16·02	3·62
35. Havering	83·87	16·13	2·28
36. South Tyneside	83·76	16·24	4·20
37. Brent	83·63	16·37	4·82
38. Cleveland	83·63	16·37	5·56
39. Norfolk	83·62	16·38	4·05
40. Cornwall	83·57	16·43	3·72
41. Sutton	83·44	16·56	4·05
42. Barnsley	83·38	16·62	2·86
43. Kirklees	83·38	16·62	3·98
44. Derbyshire	83·37	16·63	2·96
45. Gateshead	83·29	16·71	3·01
46. Wigan	83·28	16·72	3·70
47. St. Helens	83·27	16·73	3·69
48. Sandwell	83·24	16·76	3·75
49. Durham	83·13	16·87	4·35
50. Devon	83·11	16·89	3·06
51. Birmingham	83·04	16·96	4·36
52. Somerset	82·91	17·09	3·58
53. Wakefield	82·87	17·13	2·98
54. Nottinghamshire	82·72	17·28	5·24
55. Redbridge	82·71	17·29	4·91
56. Lancashire	82·66	17·34	3·65
57. North Yorkshire	82·62	17·38	4·15
58. Sheffield	82·61	17·39	3·49
59. Cumbria	82·53	17·47	4·04
60. Isle of Wight	82·48	17·52	4·68
61. Wiltshire	82·35	17·65	3·92
62. North Tyneside	82·30	17·70	5·03

LEA[3]	Percentage of PSB[1] delegated to schools	Total[2] discretionary exceptions as percentage of PSB	Central administration as percentage of PSB
63. Avon	82·30	17·70	3·40
64. Bury	81·92	18·08	4·70
65. Knowsley	81·91	18·09	5·07
66. Calderdale	81·86	18·14	4·84
67. Dorset	81·85	18·15	4·71
68. Wolverhampton	81·77	18·23	5·26
69. Humberside	81·71	18·29	3·57
70. Ealing	81·66	18·34	6·33
71. Oldham	81·64	18·36	4·98
72. Hounslow	81·59	18·41	5·19
73. Harrow	81·52	18·48	5·76
74. Enfield	81·50	18·50	5·56
75. Oxfordshire	81·37	18·63	5·46
76. Bexley	81·33	18·67	4·61
77. Coventry	80·93	19·07	6·00
78. Cambridgeshire	80·75	19·25	4·82
79. Bromley	80·70	19·30	4·49
80. Richmond	79·98	20·02	6·91
81. Merton	79·79	20·21	7·86
82. Newcastle	79·75	20·25	6·12
83. Haringey	79·36	20·64	6·04
84. Kingston	78·46	21·54	7·09
85. Barking	77·98	22·02	8·91
86. Westminster	77·97	22·03	8·20
AVERAGE	83·75	16·25	5·26

[1] PSB = General Schools Budget minus mandatory exceptions, school meals, home to school transport and transitional exceptions.
[2] Column 2 is the percentage of PSB *not* delegated to schools ie 100 per cent. minus Column 1.
Note: All 87 LEAs which introduced LMS in April 1990 were required to publish budget statements for 1990-91 under Section 42 of ERA. The table gives figures for 86 LEAs, Waltham Forest has not yet published its budget statement.

1990-91 budgets: percentage of the aggregated schools budget[1] allocated on the basis of pupil numbers and ages

LEA[2]	Percentage
1. Redbridge	89·30
2. Lincolnshire	87·27
3. South Tyneside	86·93
4. Barking	86·73
5. Bolton	85·73
6. Dudley	85·72
7. Tameside	85·57
8. North Yorkshire	85·51
9. Northumberland	85·49
10. Bromley	84·99
11. Oldham	84·77
12. Bexley	84·40
13. Gateshead	84·36
14. Wigan	84·35
15. Westminster	84·20
16. Staffordshire	84·00
17. Harrow	83·83
18. Kent	83·72
19. Coventry	83·52
20. Sefton	83·33
21. Trafford	83·28
22. Gloucestershire	83·22
23. Barnsley	82·80
24. Devon	82·64
25. Suffolk	82·57
26. Cambridgeshire	82·34
27. Avon	82·30
28. Solihull	82·29
29. Northamptonshire	82·19
30. Calderdale	82·17
31. West Sussex	82·13
32. Humberside	81·97
33. Rotherham	81·79
34. Salford	81·69
35. Isle of Wight	81·62
36. Bury	81·45
37. Cleveland	81·43
38. Hounslow	81·42
39. Wiltshire	81·00
40. Cornwall	80·93
41. Sunderland	80·69
42. Newcastle	80·66
43. Ealing	80·62
44. Durham	80·40
45. Sutton	80·29
46. Somerset	79·99
47. Warwickshire	79·89
48. Buckinghamshire	79·73
49. Berkshire	79·68
50. Enfield	79·21
51. Dorset	79·03
52. Leeds	78·90
53. Birmingham	78·63
54. Bradford	78·51
55. Merton	78·36
56. Haringey	78·25
57. Walsall	78·19
58. Kirklees	78·17
59. North Tyneside	78·00
60. Shropshire	77·91
61. Brent	77·81
62. Cheshire	77·78
63. East Sussex	77·41
64. Richmond	77·26
65. Sheffield	77·19
66. Essex	77·05
67. Bedfordshire	77·00
68. Kingston	76·84
69. Hampshire	76·63
70. Derbyshire	76·04
71. Norfolk	75·99
72. Cumbria	75·62
73. Oxfordshire	75·61
74. Doncaster	75·38
75. Havering	75·36
76. Wakefield	75·29
77. Barnet	75·19
78. Liverpool	75·00

LEA[1]	Percentage
79. Rochdale	75·00
80. St. Helens	75·00
81. Knowsley	75·00
82. Wolverhampton	75·00
83. Sandwell	74·94
84. Surrey	74·91

[1] ASB = Aggregated Schools Budget; the amount planned to be allocated through the LMS formula.

[2] The budget statements produced by Lancashire and Nottingham LEAs did not contain the relevant information. Waltham Forest has not yet published its budget statement.

EC Education Ministers

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the outcome of the meeting of European Community Education Ministers on Thursday 6 December.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the Education Council and of the EC Education Ministers meeting within the Council on 6 December. The Council and the Ministers meeting within the Council:

— agreed a resolution inviting the Commission to report on the development of the EURYDICE information network,
— invited the Commission to conduct a survey on current and planned school activities in the field of education against drug abuse and to report in the context of its report on the implementation of the resolution of 1988 on health education,
— agreed a range of activities to promote co-operation between member states in the development of assessment systems in education,
— discussed aspects of the development of professional and vocational higher education.

The meeting was preceded by an informal discussion with the Polish and Hungarian Ministers of Education and the Czechoslovakian Vice-Minister for Education.

PRIME MINISTER

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister whether any disciplinary action is proposed against Brigadier Patrick Cordingley in respect of public statements about potential casualties in the event of resort to a military option in the Gulf.

The Prime Minister: No.

Iraq (Supergun)

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Departments were consulted about the orders for Iraq placed in 1988 by Walter Somers and Forgemasters.

The Prime Minister: In the case of Walter Somers, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence were involved. For the licence application made by Sheffield Forgemasters only DTI was involved.

Nature Conservation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the representations he has had from staff of the Nature Conservancy Council in Peterborough and Huntingdon about the break-up of the Nature Conservancy Council.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* In my capacity as the Member for Huntingdon, I received several letters and other representations from constituents employed by the Nature Conservancy Council about the planned reorganisation of the council. I have responded to those representations.

Science Policy

Dr. Bray: To ask the Prime Minister if he intends to take the overall responsibility for science policy; if he proposes to chair the Advisory Council on Science and Technology and the Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology; and what arrangements he proposes to make for overall ministerial responsibility for science policy.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* My intention is to continue the arrangements set out in the White Paper, "Civil Research and Development" (CM 185) of July 1987. In particular there will be collective ministerial consideration, under my chairmanship, of science and technology policy and priorities and the provision of independent advice from the Advisory Council on Science and Technology (ACOST), chaired by Sir Robin Nicholson FRS.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will seek to arrange for the Order Paper to list the total number of questions entered in the ballot for each oral Question Time.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), at column *296*.

WALES

Hospital Closures

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the date for a decision on the hospital closures proposed by South Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: With the exception of the William Nicholls home, for which further consultation does not end until 31 December, it is hoped that decisions will be issued shortly.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office employs the Civil Service Occupational Health Service to provide this service for its 2,352 employees. It does not employ staff directly for this purpose.

Agricultural Co-operatives

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support will be given to the organisation for the promotion of agricultural co-operatives in Wales in 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society does not receive any direct Government funds. One of the changes arising from the restructuring of Food From Britain's finances in 1988 was that the Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society would not, after March 1990, receive the annual subvention it had previously enjoyed. Food From Britain's new business plan emphasised project-based funding targeted at specific objectives. Consequently, Food From Britain will still consider funding the Welsh Agriculture Organisation Society, but only on a specific project basis.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure quality control and effective monitoring of the services provided as a result of the £150,000 funding for work on alcohol abuse announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at his Department on Drinkwise Day in June.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of services are outlined in the guidance contained in WHC90(78) and WHC90(79) which were issued on 5 December 1990. Copies of both these circulars are in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons are classed as homeless in *(a)* Ceredigion and *(b)* Dyfed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Ninety-four persons in Ceredigion and 353 in Dyfed were accepted as homeless during the third quarter of 1990.

Young Offenders

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the provision of secure accommodation for 15 and 16-year-olds.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Our officials are currently conducting a review of secure child care, including secure accommodation, in Wales. They have sought and received views on the provision of secure accommodation for young people from the chief executives of the county councils in Wales; from the chief constables, chief probation officers, chief Crown prosecutors and clerks to the magistrates in the Principality; and from select voluntary organisations. In addition we have received a small number of letters from other interested parties, from members of the public and from right hon. and hon. Members. All representations received are being taken fully into account in the review.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he intends to announce to increase the amount of secure accommodation in Wales for youngsters of 15 and 16 years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier reply of today. All options for improvement in secure child care practice in Wales are being considered in the Department's review of this area. In particular, the review will assess need for secure accommodation and will consider how that need might be met in the future. We have asked for the review to be completed early in the new year.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: Departmental information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. Information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87, however, is set out in the annual report of the central unit on purchasing, copies of which are available from the Library of the House.

Health and Social Services Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* deflated according to an appropriate index of higher education pay and prices the spending on health and personal social services research in each year from 1979 to the most recent year which his Department has funded in universities, polytechnics and other related institutions.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Funding for health and personal social services research is largely provided under the joint England and Wales health and personal social services research programme. Spending on this programme in 1989-90, the latest year for which outturn figures are available, was £15·4 million.

Information for earlier years is available in the Cabinet Office annual review of Government-funded research and development.

Some additional funding for health research in Wales is provided directly by the Welsh Office. Spending in 1989-90, the latest year for which outturn figures are available, amounted to £518,000. Information for earlier years is available in the appropriation accounts.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. David Hunt: Welsh Office expenditure on advertising and other promotional activity for the past five financial years is shown in the following table:

Year	Press advertising	Television advertising	Other advertising and promotion
	£	£	£
1985-86	31,000	Nil	92,000
1986-87	49,000	27,000	331,000
1987-88	191,000	39,000	615,000
1988-89	112,000	64,000	1,105,000
1989-90	354,000	57,000	1,758,000

Expenditure for promotion videos and sound cassettes is contained within the amounts given for other advertising and promotion as records do not allow these elements to be quantified separately.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of resources will be provided for the Countryside Council for Wales in the 1991-92 financial year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The proposed provision for the Countryside Council for Wales in 1991-92 is £14,554,000. This will enable the new body to undertake a comprehensive and balanced programme of work in discharge of all its functions. It fully meets the assurances I have previously given that the council will be adequately resourced.

Soviet Union (Food Aid)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to launch a food aid package on behalf of the people of Wales to the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer Monday 10 December]:* This is a matter which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would consider sympathetically if any such request for assistance were received from the Soviet Union.

Transport

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase transport expenditure in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on planned expenditure for 1991-92 will be set out in the Welsh Office departmental report 1991 to be published early in the new year.

Epileptics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the work with epileptics and their families in parts of north Wales, undertaken with support from the Mersey Region Epilepsy Association.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend and I are aware that a number of voluntary bodies, including the Mersey Region Epilepsy Association, make a valued contribution to the development and provision of services.

Health and Personal Social Services

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has reached a decision about the allocation of resources for health and personal social services in Wales in 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval, I have decided on the allocation. I shall place a summary of my proposals in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Incomes

Ms. Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the average post-tax income of the bottom 2 per cent. of income tax payers in each financial year since 1979-80;

(2) what was the average post-tax income of the top 2 per cent. of income tax payers in each financial year since 1979-80.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are given in the table for 1979-80, and 1990-91. Information for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All estimates of income are based on information reported to tax offices and collected through the annual surveys of personal incomes. For 1979-80 the figure excludes employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes and some investment income on which tax is deducted at source. The figures for 1979-80 represent the average income of single people or married couples; for 1990-91 the figure relates to individuals following the change to independent taxation. The figures for 1990-91 are based on projections of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional.

I regret that reliable estimates for the bottom 2 per cent. of taxpayers are not available. The table therefore shows figures for the bottom 5 per cent.

Average post-tax income (£)

	1979-80[1]	1990-91[2]
Bottom 5 per cent.	1,800	4,300
Top 2 per cent.	15,100	51,800

Average tax paid (£)

	1979-80[1]	1990-91[2]
Bottom 5 per cent.	40	60
Top 2 per cent.	8,200	23,500

[1] For single people and married couples.
[2] For individuals.

European Monetary System

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the experience of France and Italy in the European monetary system since 1979 so far as employment in manufacturing is concerned; and if he will publish a table showing the numbers employed in manufacturing in Germany, France and Italy each year since 1979 and at the latest available date together with the percentage increase since 1979 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Maples: Data for manufacturing employment in France, Germany and Italy are published by the OECD in "Labour Force Statistics 1968-88".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the experience of the original EC Six in the European monetary system since 1979 so far as the rate of economic

growth is concerned; and if he will publish a table showing for each of the six the average rate of growth since 1979 as a percentage of the rate of growth in (i) the decade ending in 1973 and (ii) in the period in which the currency snake was in operation.

Mr. Maples: Data for GDP of the original members of the European Community are published by the OECD in "National Accounts 1960-88" and in "Main Economic Indicators".

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom. The Treasury employs about 3,150 staff who have access to three welfare staff and 32 first-aiders in additional to CSOHS services.

Income Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Treasury income during the financial year 1991-92 resulting from *(a)* increasing all personal allowances in line with the rise in average earnings and *(b)* increasing the threshold for the higher rate of income tax in line with earnings rather than prices.

Mr. Maude: At 1991-92 levels of income the estimated tax yield resulting from indexation in line with earnings compared with price indexation are as shown in the table. The estimates are based on the illustrative rate of price indexation of 10·25 per cent. and the working assumption of an 8·5 per cent. increase in average earnings between 1990-91 and 1991-92 used in the autumn statement 1990.

£ million

	Yield in a full year	*Yield in 1991-92*
Personal allowances	450	340
Threshold for higher rate	120	70

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers get benefits in kind; and what is their average income.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* It is estimated that in 1990-91 2·77 million taxpayers receive taxable benefits in kind and that their average earnings, including the taxable value of the benefits, are £23,000. These estimates are based on projections from data relating to 1987-88 and are provisional.

Upper Earnings Limit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who pay tax are below the upper earnings limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* It is estimated that in 1991-92 there will be about 19·5 million taxpayers in employment and self-employment aged under 65 with earned income below £20,280, the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions purposes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Syria

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Syrian Government concerning human rights in that country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 4 December 1990.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the complete removal of land-based short-range nuclear weapons in Europe through future negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The objectives of negotiations on short-range nuclear forces in Europe remain subject to discussion within the NATO alliance.

Missile Technology Control

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the transfer of items from category I to category II of the missile technology control regime, and on the application of more stringent inspection rights to ensure end-use compliance under the terms of the regime.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In collaboration with our partners we keep the missile technology and control regime equipment and technology annex under constant review. Ensuring end-use compliance is the responsibility of individual supplying Governments in co-operation with the receiving Government. The United Kingdom is prepared to consider on-site inspection where appropriate.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service,

for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the civil service occupational health service, which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom.

In addition, employees of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration (and some British Council employees overseas) benefit from a contractual arrangement with St. Thomas's hospital, which provides advice on occupational health matters as well as a wider health care service.

The St. Thomas's implant in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office consists of three full-time medical advisers, two part-time medical advisers, three full-time occupational nursing sisters, two part-time occupational nursing sisters and one health promotion adviser. In addition, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office employs a full-time staff counsellor.

The total number of staff in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office including the Overseas Development Administration at the beginning of November 1990 was 8,044.

Western Sahara

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what military, financial and logistical assistance Her Majesty's Government are planning to make available for the United Nations plan for the western Sahara recently put before the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Secretary-General has not yet formally submitted to the Security Council his definitive report on United Nations involvement in the western Sahara. Until he does, we will not be in a position to take any decision on precisely what support we will be able to offer although as a permanent member we shall, of course, be closely involved.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the right of signatories to the chemical weapons convention to retain a percentage of their stockpile of chemical weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 15 January 1990.

Gibraltar

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which European Community programmes and legislation apply to Gibraltar.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The provisions of the EC treaties apply to Gibraltar. However, under the arrangements agreed on the United Kingdom's accession to the Community, the common agricultural policy and Community rules on VAT do not apply to Gibraltar. Gibraltar is outside the Community's customs territory and the rules on free movement of goods do not apply.

Antarctic Treaty (Chile Meeting)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals for environmental protection have been tabled at the meeting of Antarctic treaty parties in Chile; and which of these proposals provides the basis on which the meeting is proceeding.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The following draft proposals were tabled at the meeting of Antarctic treaty parties, which ended in Chile on 6 December:

(i) United Kingdom environment protocol
(ii) New Zealand environmental protocol
(iii) Australian/French conservation convention
(iv) United States of America environmental protocol

All these proposals contributed to the draft protocol which was accepted at the end of the meeting as a basis for further discussion.

The Gulf (Hostages)

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is being given by his Department to relatives of hostages in Iraq and Kuwait in relation to their visiting their hostage relatives.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Saddam Hussein announced on 6 December that all foreign nationals were allowed to leave Iraq. We are arranging for the vast majority to do so. There is therefore no need for families to visit Baghdad.

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in arranging for parcels to be sent to hostages in Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The British Red Cross is already packing parcels. They will be dispatched on 19 December if there is still a need for them.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* written and *(b)* oral questions he has answered (1) last Session and (2) to date in the current Session on (i) the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, (ii) nuclear weapons testing and a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and (iii) nuclear export controls.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of questions answered is as follows:

Session	*Written*	*Oral*
1989-90		
(i)	164	3
(ii)	18	—
(iii)	5	—
1990-91		

Session	Written	Oral
(i)	7	—
(ii)	4	—
(iii)	—	—

Iraqi Nuclear Facilities

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek a report from the United Kingdom permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna on the reliability of the report of the recently conducted IAEA safeguards inspection of Iraqi nuclear facilities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No; we have confidence in the IAEA's safeguards inspection procedures.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what payments have been made direct to political parties or organisations from know-how funds or otherwise in the countries of eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union and the area formerly known as the German Democratic Republic; what was the size of each such payment and the organisation benefiting; and what was the education and training purpose of the grants.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There have been no direct payments to political parties or organisations in east and central Europe or the Soviet Union from the know-how funds or other Foreign and Commonwealth Office sources.

China

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of the People's Republic of China regarding human rights in China, with particular reference to religious activities.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My noble Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office raised the subject of human rights with the visiting Chinese Vice Foreign Minister on 21 November, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in his meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister in New York on 28 September. My hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office specifically mentioned religious activities when expressing our concern on this issue to the Chinese authorities during his visit to China in July.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on advertising and other promotional material for the years 1985-86 to 1989-90 is as follows:

	FCO Diplomatic Wing £	FCO ODA Wing £
1985-86	161,000	271,000
1986-87	336,000	228,000
1987-88	195,000	351,000
1988-89	289,000	330,000
1989-90	329,000	530,000

A disaggregation of these figures to identify the medium used is not available.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Malawi

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to monitor the observance of human rights in Malawi.

Mrs. Chalker: We regularly raise reports of human rights violations with the Malawian authorities and monitor subsequent progress.

Africa

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from Africa Watch about linking future economic assistance to African countries with steps by them to end abuses of human rights.

Mrs. Chalker: We received representations from Africa Watch on Kenya in this context, to which my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office replied. The Secretary of State has today received a further representation from Africa Watch, to which we will reply as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department; and *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport, in common with all civil service departments, has access to the services of the civil service occupational health service

(CSOHS), which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. The CSOHS operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom and also provides on-site medical advice to departments.

The Department of Transport employs 16,700 staff.

Defective Eyesight

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many candidates over the last five years failed the Department of Transport driving test due to defective eyesight; and if he will express the figures as a percentage of all failures and as a percentage of all candidates.

Mr. Chope: I am asking the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the method of conducting the eyesight check during the Department of Transport driving test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have no plans to do so. The present number plate test is a simple, cheap and effective test which can also be carried out by drivers themselves and by the police at the roadside. The College of Ophthalmologists and the Medical Commission on Accident Prevention at the Royal College of Surgeons fully endorse the test.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to introduce regular eyesight checks for drivers after they have passed the Department of Transport driving test.

Mr. Chope: None. It is the responsibility of all drivers to ensure that they continue to meet the eyesight standard for driving and to notify DVLA of any deterioration in their eyesight which might affect their ability to drive safely.

Heathrow-US Air Route

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of airlines which fly from Heathrow airport to the United States of America.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under the terms of the United Kingdom—United States air services agreement British Airways, Pan American World Airways and Trans World Airlines are permitted to operate scheduled passenger services between London Heathrow and the United States.

In addition, the following airlines have been granted permission by both the United States Government and the Government of the United Kingdom to operate scheduled passenger services from their country of origin via London (including Heathrow) to the United States:

Air India
El Al Israel Airlines
Kuwait Airways Corporation

Other airlines may be able to fly from Heathrow to the United States as part of an international route, but without traffic rights on the London—United States sector.

Channel Tunnel (Rail Services)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects orders to be placed for rolling stock for day and night services from the channel tunnel to destinations on electrified lines north of London; (2) how soon after the channel tunnel opens he expects direct services to operate from it to destinations north of London on electrified lines; and whether he expects such services to operate via the West London, Olympia—Willesden-West Hampstead lines.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 5 December at column *121*. British Rail plans to route the direct north of London services via Olympia using the west London and north London lines in the early years of tunnel operation.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make available in the Library the draft report of the inquiry into the shipwreck of MV Derbyshire.

Mr. McLoughlin: A draft report summarising the results of the Department of Transport's investigation into the tragic loss of MV Derbyshire was circulated in July 1985 to representatives of interested parties for comment. A copy of the final report was placed in the Library on 21 March 1986, and it would be inappropriate now to release copies of the earlier draft report. Since that final report was issued, an independent public inquiry into the loss of the Derbyshire has been held.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. McLoughlin: The spending by my Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion, and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes in each of the five most recent years is as follows:

£ thousands

	Press	*Television and radio*	*Other advertising*	*Video and sound cassettes*
1985-86	834	928	3,990	36
1986-87	738	592	4,440	49
1987-88	140	2,360	2,967	43
1988-89	365	1,977	3,275	92
1989-90	982	2,163	3,112	177

The expenditure by my Department is recorded in financial years, not calendar years.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend section 93(7)(a) of the Transport Act 1985 to enable transport authorities to grant fare concessions to men aged 60 to 64 years.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to change the present arrangements which link eligibility for travel concessions for elderly people to state pensionable age.

Midland Metro

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest position with regard to the appraisal of line 1 of the Midland Metro scheme proposed by the West Midlands passenger transport executive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Considerable work has been done on the appraisal, which is further advanced than that for any other light rail scheme outside London currently being considered by the Department. The formal appraisal procedure is not yet complete. If it proves favourable, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be ready to consider paying development grant in 1991-92 under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 towards the cost of preparing the scheme in greater detail so that the scheme itself may be considered for being funded in 1992-93.

Woolwich Ferry

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest estimates of the number of vehicles using the Woolwich free ferry; and what were the comparable figures at a similar point in each of the preceding five years.

Mr. Chope: The average number of vehicles carried per day was as follows:

	Number
November 1990	2,480
November 1989	2,515
November 1988	1,956
November 1987	441
November 1986	1,816
November 1985	2,945

Road Accidents

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of fatalities in accidents involving heavy duty goods vehicles over the past five years, together with the number of fatalities over the same period not involving heavy duty goods vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Following is the information:

Fatal casualties in accidents, 1985-89

Year	*HGV involved*	*HGV not involved*	*Total*
1985	811	4,354	5,165
1986	908	4,474	5,382
1987	910	4,215	5,125
1988	900	4,152	5,052
1989	989	4,384	5,373

This table shows that there was a 22 per cent. increase in fatal casualties in accidents in which at least one HGV was involved between 1985 and 1989.

Over the same period, HGV traffic, when measured in vehicle kilometres, rose by an estimated 30 per cent.

Illegal Parking

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the response to his Department's discussion document issued to local authorities on solving the problems created by parking on pavements.

Mr. Chope: Over 450 responses were received, expressing a wide range of views. We have concluded that new statutory powers are needed to allow authorities to target problem areas effectively. We are now discussing with the local authorities advice on available engineering measures to deter parking on footways and verges.

Car Phones

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to meet the Association of Chief Police Officers, or any other relevant organisation, to discuss the safety implications of the use of hand-held car telephones in moving vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I shall take the opportunity of a meeting I shall be having with ACPO on 17 December to raise this issue.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has issued any guidance to the police authorities concerning the safety implications of using hand-held car telephones in moving vehicles.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information directed to the public his Department has published on the safety implications of the use of hand-held car telephones in moving vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Advice to drivers not to use a hand-held microphone or telephone while the vehicle is moving is given in the Highway Code and several other publications.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received expressing concern at the use of hand-held car telephones in moving vehicles.

Mr. Chope: I have received several letters on this subject in recent months.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to require suppliers of hand-held car telephones to issue safety warnings at the time of purchase concerning their use in moving vehicles.

Mr. Chope: No. British Telecom already issues advice to purchasers which is consistent with the Highway Code. Officials have written to Oftel about continued publicity.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce legislation restricting the use of hand-held car telephones in moving vehicles.

Mr. Chope: No specific legislation is necessary. Drivers are already required to maintain full control over their vehicles.

Defective Eyesight

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of motor traffic accidents in the last five years where defective eyesight was found to be a contributory factor; if he will express the figures as a percentage of all moving traffic accidents for each of the years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Statistics recording accidents are derived from a factual record made by the police at the scene of the accident. They do not include an assessment of the cause and it is not therefore possible to provide information about the number of accidents attributable to a particular factor.

Manchester Relief Road (Consultation)

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy to ensure that the proposed public consultation on the route of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road will be carried out at venues and times convenient to residents of the Bury South and Bury North parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Chope: Yes.

DEFENCE

Sri Lanka

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British service personnel have been made available to the Government of Sri Lanka for any purposes during the last four years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not held centrally. I will write to the hon. Member.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Clark: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Radar Masts, Sennybridge

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals exist for the construction of radar masts or any communications system at Mynydd Eppynt near Sennybridge, Dyfed.

Mr. Alan Clark: A requirement for new defence communication facilities is under consideration, but no decisions on location have yet been taken.

Iraq (Supergun)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the involvement of the Advanced Technology Institute in the Iraqi gun order.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Advanced Technology Institute was established as a company in 1987. Since earlier this year, when we became aware of its possible association with the Iraqi gun project, we have maintained a close watch on it. The hon. Member will appreciate I cannot comment further.

Space Research Corporation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information has been received by his Department on the Space Research Corporation's contract, Babylon, with British companies;

(2) what information his Department received on the order placed by the Space Research Corporation for project 839 with British companies.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Space Research Corporation placed no contracts with British companies in this context.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Records

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the charge made at each Companies House satellite office from an inquirer who *(a)* will collect the microfiche records of the company from the satellite office or *(b)* gets the microfiche records of the company posted to his or her office or home; and how the charges are arrived at.

Mr. Redwood: Those customers who collect their microfiche records from the satellite offices are charged the £2·75 statutory fee per company record. Searches ordered from satellite offices are normally returned to the satellite office the next morning for the standard search fee of £2·75. Should however a customer require his search to be forwarded by post to an address of his choice, this is not carried out from the satellite office.

Lloyd's

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if he will review the workings of the self-regulatory status granted to Lloyd's under the Financial Services Act 1986 in the light of the actions of and the internal inquiries into the syndicates managed by Outhwaite, Oakley Vaughan, Warnlow and Feltrim.

Mr. Redwood: The committee of inquiry into regulatory arrangements at Lloyd's, whose report was published in 1987 (Cm. 59), considered the position of Lloyd's with respect to the Financial Services Act. Its recommendations have been implemented, and are designed to improve accountability of syndicates to names.

CEN Committees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government support is available to trade union representatives to attend and contribute to CEN standard-setting committees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department funds, and the British Standards Institution (BSI) administers, the assisted international travel scheme. This scheme meets part of the travel costs of certain United Kingdom representatives, including trade union representatives, who act as delegation leaders or principal experts at standards-making meetings overseas. A fixed allowance, basically equivalent to 75 per cent. of the economy class air fare, is payable. The funding provided for 1990-91 is intended to be sufficient to meet, inter alia, all eligible claims for attendance at standards meetings of CEN.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Burglary and Theft

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were sentenced for domestic burglary in England and Wales in each of the last five years for a term exceeding 10 years; and what proportion of the total number of people sentenced to prison for domestic burglary in those years they represent;

(2) how many people were sentenced for theft in England and Wales in each of the last five years for a term exceeding seven years; and what proportion of the total number of people sentenced to prison for theft in those years they represent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table.

Persons sentenced to immediate custody

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
(a) Domestic burglary					
Numbers sentenced to over 10 years	6	3	6	3	6
Percentage of all those sentenced to custody	0·05	0·03	0·06	0·03	0·08
(b) Theft					
Numbers sentenced to over 7 years	2	1	—	2	1
Percentage of all those sentenced to custody	—	—	—	0·01	—

— Less than 0·01 per cent.

Missing Persons

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide funds for missing persons support groups to run a helpline for those who have had friends or relatives go missing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are considering a request from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to fund such a helpline.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people missing from their homes in other parts of the country are estimated by the Metropolitan police to be living in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The only relevant figure available is the number of young people who have been reported missing to the Metropolitan police by other police forces in the United Kingdom. As at 7 December 1990, 357 such missing person reports were still outstanding.

These figures relate to all reports concerning missing young persons received from other police forces, and it is not possible to say in how many cases there was particular reason to believe that the subject of the report might be living in London.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government have any plans to co-operate with other European nations through Interpol for international searches for missing persons, especially children and other vulnerable people.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The use of Interpol is an operational matter for the police. All forces are aware of the facilities provided by Interpol to assist them in their inquiries.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many scientific procedures were carried out on animals during 1989 in each of England, Scotland and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: Very full information is published annually in the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals: Great Britain" (1989: Cm. 1152). To disaggregate these figures nationally might risk individual establishments being identified and the threat of violent attack is so real that we take care to protect confidentiality.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how the likely benefits of a scientific procedure are assessed when a project licence application under section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 is considered; and whether any assessment is made of the value of the products and use;

(2) how many project licences have been issued in each of the last three years for the testing of cosmetics; and whether any assessment is made during the examination of the licence application of the utility of the product being tested.

Mrs. Rumbold: Section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 requires that, before a project licence is granted, the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned must be weighed against the benefit likely to accrue from the proposed work. A number of factors contribute towards such assessments which must necessarily be subjective, and these are set out in chapter 4 of the Home Office "Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986" (1990: HC 182).

As for project licences for the regulatory testing of substances, including cosmetics, the central benefit is ensuring that such substances do not present a hazard in manufacture or transport and are safe for use by the consumer. Since the Act came into force in 1987, a total of six project licences have been issued for the safety testing of cosmetics.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to accept any of the recommendations contained in the recent RSPCA/FRAME report on the use of non-human primates as laboratory animals in Britain.

Mrs. Rumbold: We share the underlying concerns of this report that non-human primates should not be used in scientific procedures unnecessarily and that where their use can be justified scientifically they should be adequately housed and cared for.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 recognises the special position of non-human primates and section 5(6) requires that they may be used only where no other species are suitable for a proposed programme of research. Government policy on the use of non-human primates was set out fully in response to a question on 16 November 1987 by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) at columns *386-88*. The special requirements of such animals are set out in the Home Office code of practice for the housing and care of laboratory animals (1989: HC 107).

As the RSPCA/FRAME report makes clear, much of the work covered by the survey was conducted before the special controls of the 1986 Act came into force and before the recommendations for housing and care were published in the code of practice.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the review of suicide prevention management policies and procedures in prisons conducted by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: Shortly. Arrangements for publication are already in hand.

Remand

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now end the practice of holding mentally disturbed persons on remand in Brixton.

Mrs. Rumbold: The prison service is obliged to hold people who are remanded in custody by the courts, and it is the function of Brixton to deal with remand prisoners and trials from the London area. It is nevertheless the Government's policy that mentally disordered offenders should be diverted from the criminal justice system to the care of the health and social services except when custody is deemed to be in the public interest. This policy is reiterated in Home Office circular 66/70, a copy of which is in the Library.

Where custody cannot be avoided maximum use is made of the Mental Health Act to transfer those mentally disturbed inmates who require hospital treatment.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is (i) the number of inmates, (ii) the number on remand separately distinguishing the length in months they have been remanded, and (iii) the number serving sentences of longer than six months at *(a)* Cardiff and *(b)* Swansea prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: (a) On 5 December 1990, the latest date for which this information is readily available, there were 438 inmates in Cardiff prison of which 206 were on remand. The length in months for which they have been remanded is as set out in the table:

	Number
Up to 3 months	159
4 to 6 months	44
7 to 9 months	0
Over 9 months	3

The number of inmates serving longer than six months is 37.

(b) On 5 December, the latest date for which this information is available, there were 266 inmates in Swansea prison, of which 98 were on remand. The length in months for which they have been remanded is set out in the table:

	Number
Up to 3 months	73
4 to 6 months	22
7 to 9 months	3
Over 9 months	0

The number of inmates serving longer than six months is 37.

Mental Handicap Homes

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the police release information to directors of social services of local authorities on any previous convictions of persons who apply for registration of privately owned homes that care for severely disturbed mentally handicapped persons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Except where there is a statutory obligation, the disclosure of police records is at the discretion of chief officers of police. In practice chief officers generally follow guidelines agreed by the Association of Chief Police Officers and issued in Home Office circulars.

In Wales, there are local arrangements between the police and local authorities which enable social services departments to obtain information about the criminal convictions of all applicants for registration under the Registered Homes Act 1984. Similar national arrangements are being set in place and are due to be implemented in April 1991. They will enable local authorities to obtain from the police details of convictions recorded against a potential owner or manager of a residential care or nursing home. The arrangements will cover both local authority and registered homes; and will apply to small homes once those homes are brought under regulatory control.

Fire Fighting

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to satisfy himself that the training requirements of the fire service will not jeopardise the continued availability of a local fire fighting crew on islands such as Holy Island.

Mr. John Patten: The Northumberland fire authority has a duty, under the Fire Services Acts, to ensure that appropriate standards of fire cover are maintained in its area and for the efficient training of members of its brigade. It also has obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 to ensure that firefighters are adequately trained to meet the dangers of their work.

Fire cover on Holy Island is provided by a fire appliance operated by local volunteers augmented, where necessary, by firefighters from the mainland. I understand that the fire authority has been concerned that the volunteer firefighters are not adequately trained and that the authority may, as a result, be in breach of its statutory duties. The authority is considering, in discussion with the volunteers and other inhabitants of Holy Island, what further action it should take.

Data Protection

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), *Official Report*, 28 November, column *418*, he will list the organisations to which he is writing to invite comments on the EC draft directive on data protection; and if he will set out the criteria adopted by his Department in selecting these organisations.

Mrs. Rumbold: We are writing to United Kingdom organisations with a known interest in data protection issues. There are about 170; I am placing the list in the Library of the House. It is based on the data protection registrar's standard consultation list, together with other organisations which have approached us.

Weapons (EC Documents)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the implications for personal liberty and civil liberties arising from European Community documents Nos. 10074/89 and 8836/90 on the controls on the acquisition and possession of weapons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no reason to believe that the European Commission's proposal for a directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons will have any implications for personal or civil liberties in Great Britain. But if the hon. Member wishes to draw to our attention any such implications which he considers may exist, we shall consider them carefully.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Trevi group has considered the security implications of European Community documents Nos. 10074/89 and 8836/90 on the control on the acquisition and possession of weapons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The draft directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons is concerned with the legitimate possession and movements of arms within the Community. The general declaration on articles 13 to 19 of the Single European Act explicitly preserves the right of member states to take such measures as they consider necessary to combat terrorism and crime.

Public Events (Policing)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Madonna concerts at Wembley in 1990; and how much the promoters of that event were charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(2) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Knebworth rock festival for each of the past 10 years; and how much the promoters of that event were charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(3) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Castle Donnington "Monsters of Rock" festival for each of the past 10 years; and how much the promoters of that event were charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(4) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing Ascot racecourse for each of the past 10 years; and how much Ascot was charged for this policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(5) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Glastonbury rock festival for each of the past 10 years; and how much the promoters of that event were charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of the total policing costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Any charges under section 15 of the Police Act 1964 would have been a matter for the police authority concerned. No information on them is held centrally.

Football Spectators Act

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those sections of the Football Spectators Act not currently in force; and whether the Government have any current plans to bring each such section into force.

Mr. John Patten: There are no plans at present to bring into force subsections (3), (4)(b), (5) and (6) of section 1, sections 2 to 7 and subsections (6), (7), (8)(c) and 12(a) and (b) of section 10, all of which refer to a national membership scheme. The rest of the Act is currently in force with the exception of sections 9 and 13, about which I am replying separately to specific questions tabled by the hon. Member.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those parts of the Football Spectators Act currently in force and the dates on which they came into force.

Mr. John Patten: On 22 March 1990 the following provisions of the Act came into force:

(i) subsections (1), (2), (4) except paragraph (b), and (7) to (11) of section 1;
(ii) section 14, and
(iii) subsections (1), (9) and (12) of section 22.

On 24 April 1990 the following provisions of the Act came into force:

(i) sections 15 to 21;
(ii) subsections (2) to (8), (10) and (11) of section 22, and
(iii) sections 23 to 26 and schedule 1.

On 1 June 1990 the following provisions of the Act came into force:

(i) section 8 and schedule 2;
(ii) subsections (1) to (5), (8) except paragraph (c), (9) to (11), (12) except paragraphs (a) and (b), and (13) to (17) of section 10; and
(iii) sections 11 and 12.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to make an order bringing into force section 9 of the Football Spectators Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: An order bringing into effect section 9 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, which creates the offence of admitting spectators to unlicensed premises, will be made as soon as the Football Licensing Authority is in a position to issue licences for football grounds at which designated football matches are played. Both we and the Football Licensing Authority are of the view that the licensing scheme should be introduced as soon as it is practicable to do so, but it would be unrealistic to expect the authority to administer such a scheme effectively before it has acquired the necessary staff and expertise to do so.

Football Licensing Authority

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of funding made available to the Football Licensing Authority to date; what is his best estimate of the resources required by the Football Licensing Authority over the coming year; and what level of funding he will make available to the Football Licensing Authority for the next year.

Mr. John Patten: The approved provision for the Football Licensing Authority for the current financial year is £670,000. We have been advised by the authority that its actual expenditure in the period to the end of March 1991 is unlikely to exceed £270,000. Provision has been made in the public expenditure survey for the 1991-92 financial year for grant in aid to the authority of a maximum of £898,000. This represents an increase of £208,000 on the PES provision originally approved for 1991-92, before the role of the authority was reviewed in the light of Lord Justice Taylor's final report on the Hillsborough stadium disaster.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase funding for the Football Licensing Authority for fulfilling its functions under section 13 of the Football Spectators Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. Neither we nor the Football Licensing Authority have any reason to believe that the funding provision already made for the Football Licensing Authority will be inadequate to enable it properly to discharge all its statutory functions, including those under section 13 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, when that section of the Act is brought into force.

Conferences (Policing)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report as to the cost of policing the Police Federation conference for each of the past 10 years; and how much the federation was charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(2) if he will call for a report as to the cost of policing the Association of Chief Police Officers conference for each of the past 10 years; and how much the association was charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(3) if he will call for a report as to the cost of policing the Police Superintendents Association conference for each of the past 10 years; and how much the association was charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Any charges made under section 15 of the Police Act 1964 would have been a matter for the police authority concerned. No information on them is held centrally.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Labour party conference for each of the past 10 years; and how much the Labour party was charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs;

(2) if he will call for a report as to the total cost of policing the Conservative party conference for each of the past 10 years; and how much the Conservative party was charged for that policing *(a)* in actual amounts and *(b)* as a percentage of total policing costs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief officers of the forces concerned that the additional costs of policing the Conservative and Labour party conferences from 1987 onwards were estimated as follows:

Conservative

Force	*Year*	*Additional cost* £
Lancashire	1987	829,000
Sussex	1988	1,400,000
Lancashire	1989	1,080,000
Dorset	1990	2,000,000

Labour

Force	*Year*	*Additional cost* £
Sussex	1987	23,000
Lancashire	1988	61,000
Sussex	1989	4,000
Lancashire	1990	97,545

Previous figures are not held centrally. No contribution to these costs was made by the political parties concerned. The level of policing is a matter for the chief constable concerned, having regard to the threat and all other relevant circumstances.

Young Offenders

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youngsters of 15 and 16 years of age have been held in Welsh prisons during the past year *(a)* on unruly behaviour certificates or *(b)* in other circumstances.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statistics on certificates of unruliness are not collected centrally. The readily available information is given in the table.

Males[1] aged under 17 who were first received on remand under sentence into prison service establishments in Wales[2]: by type of reception and age, 1989

Type of reception	Aged 15	Aged 16
Unsentenced	27	39
Sentenced	3	11

[1] Total receptions cannot be calculated by adding both categories because a person received as an unsentenced prisoner may also subsequently be received after sentence.
[2] Usk YOI and Cardiff and Swansea prisons.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to end the practice of remanding 15 or 16-year-old boys to adult prisons pending trial or sentence.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the policy of holding 15 and 16-year-olds in Welsh prisons on unruly behaviour certificates.

Mr. John Patten: I would refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to questions from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 3 December at columns *11-12*.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Home Office purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Figures for expenditure on advertising and other promotional material for the years from 1986-87 to 1990-91 are as follows:

Year	Total advertising expenditure (all media) £ million	Production and distribution of other promotional material £ million
1986-87	5·0	1·4
1987-88	4·7	2·1
1988-89	5·4	2·8
1989-90	5·5	3·7
1990-91[1]	8·4	4·2

[1] Provisional.

It would not be possible to provide more detailed information on advertising expenditure except at disproportionate cost.

Golden Globe Charitable Trust

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Charity Commissioners to inquire into the affairs of the Golden Globe Charitable Trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: This is a matter for the Charity Commission. I understand that the commissioners have received no complaints about the administration of the Golden Globe Charitable Trust and that they have no evidence to justify launching an investigation. If the hon. Member is aware of any matters giving cause for concern I urge him to write to the chief charity commissioner.

HEALTH

Purchasing

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the purchasing policy of his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is bound by the Government's policy that purchasers should base all procurement of goods and services on value for money, including quality (or fitness for purpose) and delivery against price. In accordance with that policy, goods and services are acquired by competitive tendering unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. Under EC rules, and the GATT Government procurement agreement (GPA) where appropriate, the Department is obliged to award contracts in accordance with prescribed procedures aimed at avoiding discrimination on grounds of nationality.

Rape (HIV)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women in the United Kingdom are known to have tested seropositive for HIV subsequent to their being raped.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on rape is not requested as part of the surveillance system for HIV antibody positive reporting. Information supplied spontaneously to the public health laboratory service communicable disease surveillance centre reported two women who were tested HIV antibody positive subsequent to reported rape in England and Wales. However, from the information supplied it cannot be determined whether HIV infection was acquired through rape. No such cases have been reported to the communicable disease (Scotland) unit.

Nursing and Midwifery Colleges

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals are being considered for the transfer of responsibility for any colleges of nursing and midwifery to the Secretary of State for Education and Science;

(2) what proposals are being considered for centralising colleges of nursing and midwifery on a regional basis;

(3) if he will make it his policy to publish proposals for the protection of employment for teaching staff before any proposals are made to alter departmental responsibility for colleges of nursing and midwifery.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans for transferring responsibility for colleges of nursing and

midwifery from this Department to the Department of Education and Science, or for centralising colleges of nursing and midwifery on a regional basis. The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting has, however, encouraged the amalgamation of schools of nursing and midwifery to produce larger institutions with a wider range of resources. Schools have also been encouraged to develop links with further education and higher education institutions and in a few instances there has been full integration with such an institution. In such cases the implications for the staff of the school would be for local management to resolve.

Alternative Medicine

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what branches of complementary and alternative medicine national health service patients have access.

Mr. Dorrell: Practitioners registered with the General Medical Council may offer their patients any form of treatment, including the use of complementary therapies. There is evidence that such practitioners are making increasing use of techniques such as osteopathy, acupuncture and homeopathy.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available to national health service patients about access to alternative therapies and medicine.

Mr. Dorrell: Patients considering alternative therapies and medicines should first consult their general practitioner who is in the best position to make a clinical judgment on the most appropriate form of treatment.

Southampton General Hospital

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the number of patients on waiting lists for the Southampton general hospital by specialty.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information by individual hospital is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Professor J. B. L. Howell, the chairman of Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority, for the relevant information.

National Health Service Trusts

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that there will be no victimisation of employees of the health service who publicly opposed self-governing trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no question of anyone being victimised because they publicly opposed self-governing trusts.

Private Residential Homes

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column 99, on private residential homes, if he will break down the figures given by local authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The local authorities and health authorities which reported the cancellations of registrations of persons running residential care and nursing homes detailed in that answer were:

Residential care homes		*Nursing homes*		*Dually registered homes*
1985				
Bedfordshire	1	Doncaster HA	1	
Lancashire	1	Fylde HA	1	
		Worcester and Hereford HA	1	
	2		3	
1986				
Cambridgeshire	1	Airedale HA	1	
Devon	1	Croydon HA	1	
Dudley	1	Doncaster HA	1	
Hereford and Worcester	2	Hastings HA	2	
Hertfordshire	1			
Lancashire	1			
Liverpool	2			
Norfolk	2			
North Yorkshire	2			
Sefton	1			
South Tyneside	2			
	16		5	
1987				
Bromley	1	East Dorset HA	2	
Devon	1	Plymouth HA	1	
East Sussex	1	South East Kent HA	1	
Gloucestershire	1			
Hampshire	2			
Hertfordshire	2			
Humberside	1			
Lancashire	4			
Leicestershire	2			
Liverpool	1			
Northampton	1			
Sheffield	1			
South Glamorgan	1			

Residential care homes		*Nursing homes*		*Dually registered homes*	
Suffolk	3				
Surrey	2				
Sutton	2				
Warwickshire	2				
	28		4		
1988					
Avon	3	Bath and District HA	2	Kingston Upon Thames/ Kingston and Esher	2
Bradford	5	Clwyd HA	1		
Derbyshire	4	Eastbourne HA	2		
Devon	2	Harrogate HA	2		
Dudley	1	Northants HA	2		
East Sussex	4	Scunthorpe HA	2		
Essex	8	South Cumbria HA	1		
Havering	2	Wycombe HA	3		
Hertfordshire	2				
Kent	4				
Lancashire	2				
Liverpool	2				
Manchester	2				
Northamptonshire	2				
North Yorkshire	2				
Staffordshire	4				
Suffolk	1				
Tameside	2				
Wirral	2				
	54		15		2
1989					
Avon	1	Croydon	1	Devon CC/Exeter HA	2
Bradford	3	Kingston and Esher HA	1		
Brent	2	Scarborough HA	1		
Bromley	1				
Cleveland	2				
Devon	3				
Essex	2				
Hampshire	2				
Hereford and Worcester	2				
Hertfordshire	2				
Humberside	1				
Lancashire	4				
Leicestershire	1				
Liverpool	2				
North Yorkshire	2				
Sheffield	1				
South Tyneside	1				
Stockport	1				
Suffolk	2				
Wakefield	2				
Warwickshire	4				
Wirral	2				
Wolverhampton	1				
	44		[1]3		2

[1] Includes 2 cases relating to 1989 omitted in error in the answer given on 20 November.

The corrected figures for the reasons for the cancellations reported in 1989 are:

the fitness of persons involved in running the home: 38 cases
the fitness of premises, or their staffing: 6 cases
the conduct of the home or services or facilities provided: 24 cases
conviction of an offence under the Registered Homes Act 1984: 1 case
urgent closure on application to a Justice of the Peace: 7 cases

In a number of cases, more than one reason was cited.

General Practitioners

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regional health authority area, those general practitioner practices which have been granted fund-holding status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Formal granting of fund-holding status by regional health authorities is not expected to begin before January 1991.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether general practitioners are required to balance their budgets by March 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At present general practitioners do not have "budgets". The general practitioner

fund-holding scheme, which commences on 1 April 1991, will allow eligible practices to volunteer to receive a sum of money to purchase a range of services for their patients. Non fund-holding practices, from 1 April 1991, will be assigned an indicative prescribing amount which will relate to their drug expenditure. The indicative prescribing amount will, however, be a financial benchmark and not a cash limit.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has indicating trends in expenditure from general practitioners' budgets for drugs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The indicative prescribing scheme under which general practitioners will be set amounts for anticipated expenditure on drugs comes into operation on 1 April 1991. Since the introduction of PACT (prescribing analyses and cost system) in August 1988 there has been a slowdown in the rate of increase of the cost of drugs prescribed by general practitioners.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Dorrell: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals, doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates through a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom. On 1 November 1990 the Department had 5,002 employees.

Grading Appeals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been given or will be given to health authorities in respect of successful outstanding clinical grading appeals where there is an existing overspend.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The costs of successful clinical grading appeals are one of many factors which health authorities recognise in managing their budget for the year. The Department is not intending to issue specific guidance on this.

Patient Transport

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health or ambulance service authorities are known to be generating income by charging for patient transport services; and in each case, how much income is so generated.

Mr. Dorrell: In the year 1989-90, 31 ambulance authorities showed figures for income from charging for patient transport services. The figure for each authority is shown in the table. All figures are subject to audit and are therefore provisional.

Income from the non-NHS use of ambulance services—1989-90

	Regional indicator	*£*
Northern RHA	A00	119,078
South Tees	A03	295
East Cumbria	A04	12,640
Durham	A08	8,876
Yorkshire RHA	B00	11,918
Hull	B12	331
York	B23	62,379
Trent RHA	C00	1,274
Nottingham	C08	23,629
East Suffolk	D04	2,591
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	D07	15,407
Huntingdon	D09	14,606
Eastbourne	G02	38,234
South West Thames RHA	H00	67,983
Southampton and South West Hampshire	J22	60
Swindon	J32	24,316
Aylesbury	K21	831
Kettering	K31	285
Northampton	K32	4,222
Southmead	L13	[1](230)
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	L21	4,346
Torbay	L34	2,012
West Midlands RHA	M00	18,156
Worcester	M04	663
Shropshire	M05	419
Mid Staffordshire	M06	8,911
South Warwickshire	M11	1,581
Chester	N11	2,303
South Sefton	N42	59,108
North Western RHA	P00	11,517
Preston	P03	26,349
Total		544,090

[1]Bracket indicates a negative income.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of general practitioner-prescribed hormone replacement therapy treatments in each of the standard regions; and if he will express this cost as a figure per head of female population over 40 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

Net ingredient cost (NIC) of hormone replacement therapy treatments in 1989

Regional health authority	*NIC thousands £*	*Female population 40 and over*	*Cost/Head £*
Northern	1,419	742,946	1·91
Yorkshire	1,749	866,771	2·02
Trent	1,912	1,111,981	1·72
East Anglia	935	489,630	1·91
North West Thames	2,025	788,292	2·57
North East Thames	1,823	867,000	2·10
South East Thames	2,020	906,652	2·23
South West Thames	1,919	740,340	2·59
Wessex	1,928	711,776	2·71
Oxford	1,566	546,621	2·86
South Western	1,838	876,943	2·10
West Midlands	2,788	1,213,442	2·30
Mersey	1,405	576,683	2·44
North Western	2,174	943,210	2·30
England	25,501	11,382,287	2·24

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on a sample of prescriptions of

approximately 1 in 200 in England which were dispensed by community pharmacists.
2. The population data has been extracted from OPCS estimates.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reach conclusions about the costs and benefits of long-term hormone replacement therapy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department is funding a research project by Professor Martin Vessey of Oxford university, who is examining the costs and benefits of hormone replacement therapy in relation to the menopause. Professor Vessey's study is expected to be completed in early 1992.

Life Insurance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government have taken since the publication in November 1989 of their response to the seventh report of the Select Committee on Social Services, Session 1988-89, to consider with the insurance industry the effect of asking proposers for life insurance whether they have ever had an HIV test.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since we published our response to the Select Committee report, officials have had a number of meetings with representatives of the Association of British Insurers (ABI,) to discuss the effect of HIV test questions on proposal forms for life insurance. I met Michael Pickard, the chairman of the Life Insurance Council of the ABI, and his colleagues on 12 November. We discussed the possible effects of the ABI's recommended procedures and the need to ensure that people were not dissuaded from coming forward for testing, help and advice about HIV infection. We have, jointly with the ABI, commissioned the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) to carry out a survey of public perceptions of the effect of the questions. The BMRB is currently in the process of interviewing experts, advice workers, the general public and young adults. We expect to receive the results early in the new year, when further meetings with the ABI are planned.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of Health's budget for communications and publicity includes provision for nurse recruitment, blood donor recruitment and drug misuse campaigns.

Information for the years 1985-86 to 1987-88 is not available in the form requested.

Expenditure by the Department's information division for 1988-89 is as follows:

	£ million
Press advertising	1·196
TV and radio advertising	1·867
Other advertising	0·661
Other material (including approximately £250,000 for videos and sound cassettes)	7·075

	£ million
Expenditure for 1989-90 is as follows:	
Press advertising	2·739
TV and radio advertising	3·676
Other advertising	0·865
Other material (including approximately £200,000 for videos and sound cassettes)	9·964

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between costs of acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on total departmental expenditure on goods and services from 1986-87 onwards is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library. For years prior to 1989-90 it was not possible to differentiate Department of Health expenditure within the overall Department of Health and Social Security total.

North Derbyshire Health Authority

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what honorarium is paid to each member of North Derbyshire health authority; and how many meetings it is due to hold each year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Non-executive members of district health authorities receive an honorarium of £5,000 per annum. It is for individual health authorities to determine how often they should meet. The hon. Member may therefore wish to contact Mr. R. B. Robinson, chairman of North Derbyshire health authority, for this information.

Health Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* deflated according to an appropriate index of higher education pay and prices the spending on health and personal social services research in each year from 1979 to the most recent year which his Department has funded in universities, polytechnics and other related institutions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Spending on health and personal social services research in England and Wales for 1989-90, the latest for which outturn figures are available, was £15·4 million.

Information for earlier years has been published in the Cabinet Office annual review of Government-funded research and development, copies of which are available in the Library.

HIV

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from organisations and individuals in respect of an out-of-court settlement for people who have contracted HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to the reply, 16 November 1990, c. 248]:* The steering committee of solicitors representing the HIV haemophiliac plaintiffs and their counsel have put forward to the Department of Health proposals for the settlement of this litigation which they regard as a fair and reasonable resolution of the plaintiffs' claims.

The Government have carefully considered these proposals and agree that they will provide a fair and proper way of ending this litigation and of making financial provision for all affected haemophiliacs and their dependants, whether or not they have joined in the litigation. We believe that our case is legally strong and that the plaintiffs would not succeed in proving negligence on the part of the Department of Health. None the less the Government have always recognised the very special and tragic circumstances of the haemophiliacs infected by HIV and of their families. We recognise too the harrowing effect legal action would have on them.

The Government have therefore agreed in principle to meet the steering committee's proposals.

In outline the compromise would result in the Government providing to the Macfarlane Trust, in addition to the £34 million already paid, a further sum of about £42 million for distribution to all HIV haemophiliacs and their families according to their respective circumstances. Furthermore, the Government have agreed that payments from the Macfarlane Trust will not affect entitlement to social security and other statutory benefits. The plaintiffs' reasonable legal costs would also be paid by the Government.

Because the proposed settlement will require the formal approval of all individual plaintiffs, and in the case of minors, of the court, it would be inappropriate at this time to publish further details until all plaintiffs and the court have had an opportunity to consider the full terms of the settlement and to approve them.

The Government would apply the outcome of any settlement to all parts of the United Kingdom.

The Government welcome these developments, which offer a speedy way of ending the lengthy period of uncertainty for haemophiliacs and their families and of giving them additional financial security.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Official IRA

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information his Department has on whether the Official IRA continues to exist in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I believe that the Official IRA still exists.

Health Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* deflated according to an appropriate index of higher education pay and prices the spending on health and personal social services research in each year from 1979 to the most recent year which his Department has funded in universities, polytechnics and other related institutions.

Mr. Hanley: Spending by the Department of Health and Social Services on health and personal social services research in Northern Ireland for 1989-90, the latest year for which an outturn figure is available, was £0·83 million.

Information for earlier years has been published in the appropriation accounts for Northern Ireland Departments.

Home Help

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many individuals currently in receipt of home help service receive *(a)* less than one hour per day, *(b)* less than two hours but more than one hour per day, *(c)* less than three hours but more than two hours per day and *(d)* more than three hours per day;

(2) how many individuals currently in receipt of home help service receive a daily allocation of home help time Monday to Saturday but no service on Sunday;

(3) how many individuals currently in receipt of home help service receive a daily allocation of home help time Monday to Friday but no service on Saturday and Sunday;

(4) what was the average amount of home help time received, per day, by each individual in receipt of home help service in each year since 1986, in each health board area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answers 4 December 1990]:* The information requested could be made available only at disproportionate cost to the health and social services boards which are responsible for the management and delivery of the home help service.

ENVIRONMENT

Private Rented Housing

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the private rented housing market since the Housing Act 1988.

Mr. Yeo: It is too early to assess the overall impact of the Act on private renting. Research now in progress will provide information in the course of 1991. There are, however, clear signs of increased activity in the residential lettings market. In particular, business expansion scheme companies have so far raised £550 million, which will provide about 10,000 new homes to rent.

Bathing Beaches

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the National Rivers Authority reports covering all of England and Wales which provide information on the bathing beaches monitoring programme for the 1990 bathing season.

Mr. Baldry: The Secretary of State announced on 14 November that a detailed summary of these National Rivers Authority monitoring results will be placed in the Library.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in view of the decision by South Yorkshire waste disposal joint committee to close its

hazardous waste unit, he proposes to exercise his powers under section 31 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution expects to submit a report to the Secretary of State shortly on the arrangements for waste regulation in South Yorkshire. My right hon. Friend will wish to consider this carefully before deciding whether it would be appropriate to use his powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1985 to set up a metropolitan waste authority for the area. He has no intention at this stage of using his powers under section 31 of the Environmental Protection Act to set up a regional waste authority.

Home Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the real rate of increase in house prices in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* Italy since 1985.

Mr. Yeo: House prices in the United Kingdom increased by 101 per cent. between 1985 and the third quarter of 1990, as measured by the Department of the Environment's index. Information about house prices in the other three counties is not regularly received in the Department.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to review his proposed standard spending assessments for 1991-92 for *(a)* the London borough of Westminster and *(b)* the London borough of Wandsworth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: All authorities are treated on the same basis for the purposes of calculating standard spending assessments. We are at present considering all representations received in respect of the proposals for revenue support grant in 1991-92 set out in the statement of 31 October. We will announce final decisions shortly.

Benzene

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the total amount of benzene emitted to the atmosphere by combustion engines in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: Benzene emissions into the atmosphere have been estimated by the Harwell laboratory in a report: "Hydrocarbon involvement in Photochemical Ozone in Europe, AERE-R 13736". Copies of the report have been deposited in the Library of the House. In 1987 total benzene emissions for the United Kingdom amounted to about 36,000 tonnes, of which 61 per cent. has been attributed to petrol vehicle exhaust, 21 per cent. from the evaporation of motor spirit and 10 per cent. from diesel vehicle exhaust.

Vacant Land

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement, further to the consultation paper "Encouraging the Use of Vacant Public Land", as to the particular functions and the timescale which would be accepted by him as constituting sufficient grounds on which to regard development plans as being firm.

Mr. Yeo: Deciding whether an owner's plans are sufficiently firm to make the issue of a direction undesirable is essentially a matter of judgment, taking all relevant factors, including the owner's purpose and the timescale of the proposed development, into account. My right hon. Friend will consider each case on its merits.

Red-eared Terrapins

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to discourage the importation for sale of red-eared terrapins as domestic pets.

Mr. Baldry: At present, there are no conservation reasons for restricting the importation of red-eared terrapins, because there is no evidence that they are endangered, or are becoming endangered in the wild. We are, however, currently discussing with our European partners a new EC regulation to replace regulation 3626/82, which implements the convention on international trade in endangered species (CITES) within the European Community; and we shall ensure that the question whether red-eared terrapins should be brought within the control of this regulation is given careful consideration.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has received regarding ecological damage caused by red-eared terrapins, formerly domestic pets, which have been released into the wild.

Mr. Baldry: I am not aware of any evidence of ecological damage caused by red-eared terrapins being released into the wild in Britain.

Planning Legislation

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decisions he has made on the proposals in his Department's April 1990 consultation paper, "Miscellaneous Amendments to Subordinate Planning Legislation".

Mr. Yeo: After careful consideration of all the responses to the consultation paper, "Miscellaneous Amendments to Subordinate Planning Legislation", the Government have decided to proceed with the following proposals:

(a) to include a statement of owners' property rights on the form which applicants for planning permission are required to serve on the owners and others with an interest in the land;

(b) to grant permitted development rights to licensed operators of driver information systems to install the requisite equipment, subject to limitations governing size and height;

(c) to amend the restriction on the use of factory and warehouse extensions built under the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 to allow their use for social, welfare and recreational uses ancillary to the main function of the site;

(d) to include dry cleaning establishments in the Shops class (A1) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987.

The Government have decided not to proceed with the following proposals:

(i) to grant permitted development rights for postal pouch boxes;

(ii) to grant permitted development rights for the installation of liquefied gas tanks in the curtilage of dwellinghouses;

(iii) to include launderettes in the Shops class (A1) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987.

Amending orders reflecting these decisions will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Running Costs

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) on 8 November, *Official Report*, columns *15-16*, if he will make a further statement on his Department's running costs limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Heseltine: I regret that the calculation of the cumulative changes in my Department's running costs limit across the votes concerned contained an error. The running costs limit has, in fact, been increased by £4,296,000 from £153,458,000 to £157,754,000.

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposed to take in regard to Doncaster metropolitan borough council under part I of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has today issued a direction under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988 requiring Doncaster metropolitan borough council to expose certain building cleaning work to competitive tendering again by 1 November 1991. He has taken this action because he was not satisfied with the response which Doncaster metropolitan borough council made to the notice served on 21 September 1990 under section 13 of the Act.

That notice set out the Secretary of State's view that Doncaster metropolitan borough council had acted contrary to the requirement of section 7(7) of the act (which is that, in awarding a contract, an authority must not act in a manner having the effect or intended or likely to have the effect of restricting, distorting or preventing competition) in that, in putting building cleaning work out to tender with a start date for contracts of 1 September 1990, they packaged the work and adopted a timetable for the tendering in an anti-competitive manner. The Secretary of State has decided to take no further action in the case of the so-called north, east and west area contracts. His direction relates to building cleaning work comprised in the so-called south area contract, which is the largest of the four area contracts put out to tender.

Protected Species

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to destroy protected species in 1989 and 1990, the different species they were issued for and the number for each species.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 27 November 1990]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local authority (i) the amount of capital receipts generated in 1988-89 and 1989-90 and (ii) the amount available from these receipts for capital projects with totals for each class of authority and England as a whole.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* I have today arranged for the available information to be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Students

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students in receipt of grant withdrew from their course in institutions on higher education in the past full academic year; what was the total grant involved; and if he will express that figure as a percentage of all grant awards made.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 1,634 students in receipt of a maintenance grant under the students' allowances scheme withdrew from their courses during academic session 1989-90. The maintenance grant payments made to them amounted to £1,778,885, which represents 2·03 per cent. of all maintenance payments made in respect of that academic session.

Health and Social Services Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* deflated according to an appropriate index of higher education pay and prices, the spending on health and personal social services research in each year from 1979 to the most recent year which his Department has funded in universities, polytechnics and other related institutions.

Mr. Lang: Spending on health and personal social services research in Scotland for 1989-90, the latest for which outturn figures are available, was £5·7 million.

Information for earlier years has been published in the Cabinet Office annual review of Government-funded research and development.

AIDS

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total sum spent by his Department on research into human AIDS.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of £1·1 million.

Road Works

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to increase the amount of local authority general road works that is subject to competitive tender.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I consider that additional competition for roads work will be beneficial in securing better value for money. We have therefore decided to increase from 30 per cent. to 60 per cent. the minimum proportion of the aggregate value of road jobs costing £25,000 or less which must be put out to competitive tender by local authorities in Scotland under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Our decision will bring arrangements in Scotland in line with

those which have been in force in England and Wales since 1 April 1988. I shall be laying the necessary regulations to give effect to this change which is to come into operation from 1 April 1991.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information the Scottish Office is gathering on the impact of Scottish students of the poll tax in order to evaluate the policy and to prepare new legislation.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* For the purposes of the recently announced review of the community charge, my right hon. Friend will be considering to what extent he needs to supplement the information already available to him about the position of students, as about other relevant aspects.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* by region the actual average non-domestic rate valuation increases resulting from the 1990 revaluation.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 7 December 1990]* The percentage change in the aggregate rateable value in each regional and islands area between 1 April 1989 and 1 April 1990 is shown in the table. Although the major cause of the increases will have been the revaluation of non-domestic property which took effect on 1 April 1990, other factors such as additions to and deletions from the valuation roll will also be reflected in the figures.

	Per cent.
Borders	46·8
Central	29·2
Dumfries and Galloway	36·4
Fife	25·7
Grampian	21·4
Highland	46·8
Lothian	46·4
Strathclyde	41·1
Tayside	49·5
Orkney	8·3
Shetland	12·4
Western Isles	41·0

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by region the average increases in non-domestic rate valuations on which he calculated the Scottish average valuation increase for adjusting the non-domestic rate poundages in the current year.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* The non-domestic rates prescribed for 1990-91 were not determined using regional average increases in rateable values but by applying the average increase in rateable values for Scotland as a whole. The factor used was based on estimates provided by regional assessors, the Treasury valuer and the assessor of public undertakings (Scotland), supplemented with a sample survey undertaken by regional assessors at the request of the Scottish Office. An adjustment was made to reflect the change in the level of industrial derating. Disaggregation of the estimates by regions gives the values shown in the table. The figure for Fife is lower than it should be because of an error in the apportionment of the rateable value of the electricity companies among regions which was corrected before the new valuation roll came into effect. This had no effect on the factor used to determine non-domestic rates for 1990-91.

	Per cent.
Borders	39·1
Central	21·5
Dumfries and Galloway	35·0
Fife	12·6
Grampian	22·9
Highland	30·4
Lothian	44·6
Strathclyde	40·9
Tayside	41·6
Orkney	18·5
Shetland	11·8
Western Isles	23·0

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many persons who have been found eligible for relief under the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 were dead prior to the coming into force of the said regulations;

(2) how many persons, to date, have been eligible to have their liability to pay the personal community charge reduced for the financial year 1989-90, by virtue of the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (No. 2) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, in each local authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Details of the numbers of persons eligible for relief under these regulations are still awaited from local authorities. Where a person died prior to the coming into force of the regulations, payment of relief may be made to the executor of the deceased's estate, where the other criteria for entitlement to relief have been met. Returns from authorities to the Department are not required to identify such cases separately.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, in reviewing the poll tax, he will bring forward proposals to end the joint and several liability for spouses' poll tax debts.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has made it clear that the forthcoming review will consider all aspects of the community charge arrangements.

Football Spectators

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of criminal proceedings currently in progress in Scotland involving alleged offences by persons from England or Wales which correspond to offences contained in schedule 1 of the Football Spectators Act 1989; when is the likely date of completion of each of these proceedings; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* There is one such case currently in progress in Scotland. No date has yet been fixed for it to call in court.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has anything to add to the reply of 21 November, *Official Report*, column 285, in the light of representations from the British Medical Association and the area medical committee concerning their reactions to Lothian health board's proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* In response to Lothian health board's consultation

document, the Lothian area medical committee in its letter of 16 July gave a clear statement of support for the concentration of paediatric medical and surgical services, of neurosurgery, of urological services and of accident and emergency services, and the movement as proposed of respiratory medicine, rheumatology and lithotripsy. This represents a substantial proportion of the board's proposals.

The committee also expressed concern that the proposals would result in a reduction in the quality and quantity of clinical care. Both I and my right hon. Friend have acknowledged that some specialties will be temporarily inconvenienced during the implementation of the changes. In the longer term a new pattern of acute hospital services will be created to allow the more efficient use of medical and nursing staff, as well as of buildings and facilities.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects and centres to which his Department has contributed financially in respect of research into alcohol misuse, with the figure for each such project or centre in the present financial year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Project Title	*Project co-ordinators*	*Grant in 1990-91 £*
Evaluation of a home detoxification service.	Forth Valley Health Board	1,000
Antibody Against Acetaldehyde—Protein adducts as possible aversion treatments for modifying alcohol consumatory behaviour and as new tools for identifying chronic alcohol consumption.	Aberdeen University	10,000
Literature review on alcohol and young people	Law School, University of Strathclyde.	4,000

In addition, the Scottish Home and Health Department has provided funding of £95,000 in 1990-91 towards the cost of the research unit in health and behavioural change at Edinburgh university. Alcohol misuse is one of a range of factors studied by the unit which directly or indirectly cause ill-health.

Afforestation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that afforestation projects involve the planting of indigenous, ecologically important species of trees.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The Forestry Commission normally requires a proportion of the trees in any afforestation project under the woodland grant scheme to be broadleaved, and these are often indigenous species. Higher rates of planting grant are available for broadleaved trees and last year over 75 per cent. of the trees planted under the farm woodland scheme and nearly 25 per cent. of all the trees planted under the woodland grant scheme were broadleaved. In Scotland, the Forestry Commission has special grants to encourage the establishment of new native pinewoods.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will encourage the development of natural woodland by a process of long-term set-aside of land for colonisation by indigenous trees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Through the woodland grant scheme, the Forestry Commission encourages the owners of suitable land to set aside areas for the natural regeneration of indigenous trees. Grants are available for this purpose under the scheme.

RECHAR Programme

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the implementation of the EC RECHAR programme to support areas in Scotland affected by the closure of coal mines; and what funds are being made available by his Department in addition to previous spending plans to ensure that full advantage is taken of that programme in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Proposals for RECHAR programmes in eastern and western Scotland were submitted by the Government to the European Commission on 27 July. Decisions are awaited. Assuming the Commission grants money to the Scottish programmes, the Government will ensure that the provisions of the Community regulations on additionality are fully met.

Health Service

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the formula whereby the Greater Glasgow health board calculates the reimbursement of ancillary staff salaries to general practices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* This is a matter for Greater Glasgow health board, within the terms of the statement of fees and allowances.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the proceeds of the sale of the Scottish Development Agency property portfolio in 1990-91; and how these proceeds have been used.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Receipts for the period 1 April 1990 to 30 November 1990 in respect of all disposals of property amount to £58·5 million. These proceeds, taken together with the agency's general business receipts and with grant-in-aid provision, are being used to finance the agency's gross expenditure during the year.

Mental Handicap Nursing

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what advice he has given to local authorities in Scotland regarding the maintenance and professional role of those nurses with mental handicap training in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what specific future role there is for nurses with mental handicap training in the new arrangements for community care in Scotland;

(2) what specific future role there is for nurses with mental handicap training in the new arrangements for the national health service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Nurses with mental handicap training will continue to fulfil a vital role in the provision of specialised health services for people with mental handicaps. Although over time, some of these nurses may change their place of work, they will continue to be required to provide skilled care for people with severe or profound handicaps whether living in institutions or the community where they will often be members of community mental handicap teams. In addition, hospitals, although reduced in size, will continue to provide care for a substantial number of patients for the foreseeable future. In due course local authorities will make their own decisions on the skill mix and the staffing levels required for their services and any necessary central guidance will be issued at the appropriate time.

Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at 1990-91 figures, how much was spent on youth training in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and how much will be spent in 1991-92 in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Expenditure on youth training in Scotland in 1989-90 at 1990-91 prices was £110,976,000.

Figures for expenditure on youth training in Scotland for the year 1990-91 will not be available until after the end of that financial year.

Budgets for expenditure on youth training in Scotland in 1991-92 have yet to be finalised and will in due course be published in grant-in-aid tables in the supply estimates for the regional and general industrial support, Scotland vote (class XV vote 3) for 1991-92.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at 1990-91 figures, how much was spent on employment training in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and how much will be spent in 1991-92 in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Expenditure on employment training in Scotland in 1989-90 at 1990-91 prices was £133,686,000.

Figures for expenditure on employment training in Scotland in 1990-91 will not be available until after the end of that financial year.

Budgets for expenditure on employment training in Scotland in 1991-92 have yet to be finalised and will in due course be published in the grant-in-aid tables in the supply estimates for the regional and general industrial support, Scotland vote (class XV vote 3) for 1991-92.

Agency Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross provision for the Scottish Development Agency in every year since 1979 and the non-training element of Scottish Enterprise for 1991-92 expressed at 1990-91 price levels.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The information is set out in the table:

	£ million
1979-80	174·8
1980-81	178·8
1981-82	162·9
1982-83	191·2
1983-84	172·6
1984-85	167·0
1985-86	176·2
1986-87	170·1
1987-88	166·9
1988-89	163·9
1989-90	171·0
1990-91	[1]129·0
1991-92	[2]170·0

[1] Estimated.
[2] Planned.

Planned provision for 1991-92 is not directly comparable to provision for earlier years because it reflects an adjustment to the division of responsibility for environmental improvements between Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, as compared with that which has existed between the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will itemise how the budget of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise in 1991-92 are made up in terms of grant in aid, property income, equity income, training and other items.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The composition of the budgets of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for 1991-92 has yet to be finalised and is under discussion with the two bodies. The information will be shown in due course in grant-in-aid tables published as part of the supply estimates for the regional and general industrial support Scotland vote (class XV vote 3) for 1991-92.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross provision for the Highlands and Islands Development Board for 1991-92, expressed at 1990-91 price levels.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The Highlands and Islands Development Board will be replaced by Highlands and Islands Enterprise on 1 April 1991. As well as taking over the functions of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, Highlands and Islands Enterprise will take over the Scottish Development Agency environmental function and the Training Agency's functions in the Highlands and Islands area. The notional amount allocated to former Highlands and Islands Development Board functions for 1991-92, expressed at 1990-91 price levels, is £50·4 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will receive disability working allowance because they were receiving *(a)* invalidity benefit alone, *(b)* severe disablement allowance alone and *(c)* a disability premium with income-related benefits within eight weeks before claiming disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: Estimates of the likely case load of disability working allowance can be only tentative. Our best estimate is that, once the benefit is established, about 50,000 people will receive DWA at any given point. Of these, around 25 per cent. will have been getting invalidity benefit (but not income support) before claiming DWA; 10 per cent. will have been getting severe disablement allowance (but not income support) before claiming; and 35 per cent. will have been getting an income-related benefit with a disability premium (alone or with invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance) before claiming. A further 30 per cent. will already be in work and will qualify because they have disability living allowance. Of the first two categories a number will have been receiving housing benefit or community charge benefit.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to extend financial assistance available to disabled people with special dietary needs.

Mr. Scott: The OPCS surveys showed that the existing extra costs benefits are providing good coverage of people with all sorts of disabilities, including people with eating, drinking and digestion disorders. The new disability living allowance with its lower rates will extend this to people not currently receiving benefit.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish estimates of the extra expenditure in gross and net terms if no tariff income from capital was taken into account in calculation of disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: Estimates of the likely expenditure on disability working allowance (DWA) have been based on assumptions about behavioural changes among people who have a continuing entitlement to a long-term incapacity benefit, but who might take the opportunity offered by DWA to do some work. As a result, the projections can be only tentative and it is not possible to estimate with confidence the extra expenditure, either in gross or net terms, if no tariff income from capital was taken into account.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the average potential gains in income for recipients of the disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: Disability working allowance will ensure that the great majority of potential recipients will be better off in work than they would be on incapacity benefits. However, it is not possible to predict with confidence the average gain in income for recipients.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions were held with the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd. in respect of employers' liability to fund SSP payments on the introduction of statutory sick pay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Ministers held a series of meetings with representatives of small business organisations, including the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, prior to the introduction of statutory sick pay (SSP). Among the matters discussed at those meetings was the method of compensating employers for payments of SSP.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make extra funds available for community care grants for his Department's local office in Perry Barr, Birmingham.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Consumer Goods

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the acquisition and ownership of consumer goods by pensioners in 1974, 1979 and 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on ownership of selected goods is given in the table. The data have been calculated using published data from the family expenditure survey. The year 1989 is the latest year for which these figures are currently available.

Percentage of pensioner households with goods

	1974	*1979*	*1989*
Telephone	32·0	49·8	85·7
Central heating	31·9	43·2	70·1
Fridge	65·2	84·0	96·6
Washing machine	45·6	55·5	71·4
Television	89·5	94·1	98·0
Car	20·6	23·1	37·9

Note: This covers the following types of households: one adult retired households mainly dependent on state pensions; one man and one woman retired households mainly dependent on state pensions; other retired households containing one adult; other retired households containing one man and one woman.

Youth Training (Income Support)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of youth training trainees in receipt of income support during 1988-89 and 1989-90; and what was the average size of income support payments to youth training trainees in each of those two years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

State Pension Scheme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will express the cost of the Government's scheme on opting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme *(a)* in cost terms, *(b)* in terms of the pence reduction equivalent in income tax, *(c)* in terms of a reduction in poll tax, for the average poll tax payment and *(d)* in terms of a one-off cash payment to each pensioner.

Miss Widdecombe: Contracting out of the state earnings-related pensions scheme by virtue of an approved occupational pension scheme was introduced by the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. The Government Actuary's report on the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990 (Cm. 948) showed that in 1990-91 the total contribution reductions attributable to both occupational and personal pensions would be about £7·6 billion of which about £2 billion would be in respect of rebates and incentives for personal pensions. It is not appropriate to express these reductions in other ways because they relate directly to benefits that would otherwise be a charge upon the national insurance fund, and the fund in turn depends upon the levels of national insurance contributions and the benefit expenditure which it is required to meet.

Pension Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to enlarge the power of pension fund trustees.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received over the operation of company pension funds.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department receives representations from time to time on various aspects of company pension funds.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to secure the financial interest of company pension fund beneficiaries.

Miss Widdecombe: The Social Security Act 1990 introduced a number of measures to help members of occupational pension schemes. Members will have a statutory right to annual increases for pension rights built up in the future. Schemes will have to use any surpluses to give increases up to a required level. On the insolvency of an employer, an independent trustee must be appointed to look after members' interests on the winding up of a scheme. From 1 January 1991 early leavers will get the whole of their preserved pension revalued.

In addition, a pensions ombudsman will be able to assist individuals who have problems with their occupational or personal pension scheme.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what legal or regulatory frameworks exist to control the relationship of a company pension fund to its parent company.

Miss Widdecombe: Most occupational pension schemes are set up voluntarily by employers as irrevocable trusts and are therefore subject to trust law. In addition, schemes are required to satisfy the statutory requirements laid down by the Social Security Acts and the requirements for obtaining tax approval under the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1958.

Research

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* deflated according to an appropriate index of higher education pay and prices the spending on social security research in each year from 1979 to the most recent year which his Department has funded in universities, polytechnics and other related institutions.

Miss Widdecombe: Total spending on social security research in 1989-90 (the latest year for which information is available) was £937,000. Available information for previous years is published in the Cabinet Office annual review of research and development, a copy of which is in the Library.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. In 1987, a departmental purchasing supply directorate was established by

the Department of Health and Social Security. Before that date purchasing information in the Department of Health and Social Security was not consolidated and information for the financing year 1985-86 is not readily available. Information on purchasing expenditure for the financial years 1986-87 to 1988-89 is given in the table. The figures for the years 1986-87 to 1988-89 cover the Department of Health as well as the Department of Social Security. This information is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are in the Library.

£ million

	1986-87[1]	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Goods	244·118	268·348	205·090	187·835
Services	363·780	375·463	437·249	487·181
Capital	53·741	57·060	99·348	137·740
Total	661·639	700·838	741·687	812·756

[1] Estimate.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many deaf-blind people have *(a)* claimed mobility allowance and *(b)* been awarded mobility allowance since April.

Mr. Scott: From 11 April 1990 to 30 November 1990, 747 mobility allowance claims have been made under the deaf-blind provisions. Of these, 347 have been awarded mobility allowance, 278 have been refused and 122 claims are currently being processed.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Miss Widdecombe: For information from 1985-86 to 1988-89, I refer the hon. Member to replies given to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 19 December 1986 at columns *793-94*, on 14 January 1988 at column *402* and on 13 March 1989 at column *30*.

Expenditure by the Department in 1989-90 is:

	£ million
Press	1·486
Television and radio	5·313
Other (including leaflets and videos)[1]	8·843
Sound cassettes	£12,000

[1] Separate information about expenditure on videos is not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to ensure that cattle with enzootic bovine leukosis are not imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Imported cattle must be accompanied by a health certificate, signed by an official veterinarian of the Government of the exporting country, confirming among other things that the animals originate from holdings which have been free of enzootic bovine leukosis (EBL) for up to three years, and that the animals have been subjected to the required testing for EBL, with negative results, before export.

From 1 July 1991, rules governing trade between member states of the European Community will require that cattle for breeding and production must come only from herds which are officially recognised as EBL free.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department has any evidence that residues of dichlorvos are found in the flesh of farmed salmon.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 22 November to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos), *Official Report*, column *215*.

Cling Film

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to assure himself that the additives used in the manufacturing of cling film have been adequately tested and have been approved for use with all foodstuffs, including fatty foodstuffs; what requirements there are for product labelling with this information; and what assessment he has made of the risk to public health from this product.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment have recently advised that there is no evidence to suggest that the use of additives in cling films has caused harm to human health, and these films remain suitable for most food uses. However, for some additives the toxicological data are not yet complete and as a matter of prudence the committees have advised that cling films should not be used in certain applications, such as in contact with high fat foods.

Manufacturers are recommended to label packs in accordance with the advice given in the food safety directorate's information bulletin, special edition, a copy of which is in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure by this Department in each of the last five years on advertising in the press, radio and television and other promotion is as follows:

	Advertising in the press (£)	Advertising on television and radio (£)	Other promotional material (£)
1985-86	29,000	Nil	656,000
1986-87	54,000	Nil	825,000
1987-88	12,000	Nil	693,000
1988-89	380,000	Nil	1,004,000
1989-90	116,000	Nil	2,385,000

The figures for other promotional material include videos produced as part of overall public information campaigns. Separate figures for production of these and sound cassettes could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries which are refusing to import British milk due to concerns over BSE; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The only countries currently restricting imports of milk and milk products because of concerns about BSE are China, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and the USSR.

All the scientific evidence is that milk and milk products are quite safe to consume in any form. This view has been endorsed by the European Community's scientific experts and those of the Office Internationale des Epizooties (OIE). A recent OIE report on BSE recommends that exports of milk and milk products from the United Kingdom should not be restricted for either animal or public health reasons. We will continue to press countries which have imposed restrictions to lift them.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pesticide active ingredients applications he has *(a)* received, *(b)* approved and *(c)* rejected to date in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is set out in the table in respect of applications for agricultural pesticides submitted to this Ministry for approval by the six Departments responsible. Applications for which the Health and Safety Executive is primarily responsible—non-agricultural pesticides—are not included.

	Number
Received	7
Approved (fully/provisonally)	6
Approved for experimental use only	1
Rejected/Withdrawn	5

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the active pesticide ingredients which have been reviewed since March 1989; whether they were subject to a full or partial review; whether the active ingredients were withdrawn fully or partially; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The following agricultural pesticides have been reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides since March 1989. (F = Fully, P = Partially).

Captafol	(F) Phased revocation (final use ended 31 October 1990)
Daminozide	(P) No change
Dimethoate	(P) Approvals amended
Fenbutatin oxide	(P) No change
Fentin acetate	(P) Approvals amended
Fentin hydroxide	(P) Approvals amended
Iprodione	(P) Approvals amended
Alachlor	(F) Approvals amended
EBDC's	(P) Approvals amended
2-Aminobutane	(P) Approvals amended

At present 43 agricultural pesticides are undergoing review, of which four are partial reviews.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* active ingredients and *(b)* pesticide products are currently approved for use in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: The approximate number of pesticides currently approved for use is as follows:

	Agricultural	Non-agricultural
Active ingredients	360	90
Products	3,400	1,100

Full details are given in Her Majesty's Stationery Office publication "Pesticides 1990", a copy of which has been lodged in the Library.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the present levels of environmentally sensitive area payments; if he has any plans to revise them; and if he will also express them at 1986 prices.

Mr. Curry: The present level of ESA payments is shown in the table.

ESA		£/HA
Broads	Tier 1	125
	Tier 2	200
Breckland	Tier 1	100
	Tier 2	125
	Tier 3:	
	UWS	300
	CH	100
North Peak	Tier 1	10
	Tier 2	20
Pennine Dales		100
Shropshire Borders	Tier 1	30
	Tier 2	80
Somerset Levels and Moors	Tier 1	82
	Tier 2	120
South Downs	Tier 1	35
	Tier 2	160
Suffolk River Valleys	Tier 1	70
	Tier 2	180
	Tier 3	200
Test Valley		80
West Penwith		60

It was made clear at the outset that it would not be appropriate for these payments to be index-linked, but that they would be reviewed after three years. The review carried out last year for those ESAs designated in 1987 concluded that the payments were still at broadly the right levels. I am now reviewing payments in ESAs designated in 1988, and I will be conducting a full-scale review of the scheme next year to determine the way forward.

Monetary Compensatory Amounts

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reasons which lay behind the introduction of monetary compensatory amounts.

Mr. Curry: Monetary compensatory amounts were introduced in 1969 when it was agreed that changes in exchange rates should not immediately apply to the exchange rates used to convert common agricultural support prices into national currencies; they were intended to enable trade between member states to continue at common price levels and so prevent the distortions of trade that use of differing exchange rates would have encouraged.

Flooding, River Severn

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the number of places along the River Severn where its banks have burst in each of the last 10 years and the number of dwellings, farms and small holdings that have been damaged as a result.

Mr. Curry: There has been no breaching of the banks of the River Severn over the last 10 years. All the flooding which has occurred over this period has been caused by banks being over-topped, consistent with the design which allows over-topping so that river levels can be kept below the point where serious urban flooding of large towns might occur.

No precise data are available on the number of properties flooded over the last 10 years in the lower and upper Severn areas. In the tidal reach downstream of Gloucester, about 100 domestic properties and two caravan sites in this area have been flooded by high tides, some on more than one occasion. The incidence of tidal flooding along these banks will be reduced as the River Severn tidal defence scheme progresses.

The extensive floods of last winter, which were of a magnitude that might occur once in 20 years, caused damage to about 350 properties in the upper and lower Severn flood plain. About 60 of these were commercial properties and a further six were farm houses. During this event, a total of 75 sq km of agricultural land was inundated by flood water. Most of the lower Severn over-topped its banks on both sides between Worcester and Gloucester and in the upper Severn upstream of Worcester over-topping occurred in approximately six places.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Curry: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Tobacco

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries to which high-tar EC tobacco is exported; and what quantities are involved.

Mr. Curry: EC published export statistics for tobacco are not broken down by tar content. Exports of EC tobacco in 1989 were 185,067 tonnes, some 13 per cent. of world exports of unmanufactured tobacco. Eurostat statistics giving countries of destination and quantities are available in the Library of the House.

Ewe Premium

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the payments of the second instalment of the ewe premium have been made; and by what date these payments should be completed.

Mr. Curry: About 95 per cent. of all first and second instalments due to producers in England under the 1990 sheep annual premium scheme have now been paid. The outstanding claims will be passed for payment as soon as the necessary checks have been completed.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of this year's suckler cow premium payments have been made; and by what date these payments should be completed.

Mr. Curry: As at 10 December 10,135 payable orders had been issued to producers in England in respect of claims made under the 1990-91 suckler cow premium scheme. The scheme remains open to applications until 31 January 1991. It is not, therefore, possible to say what proportion of the eventual total this figure represents.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

4. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of unemployed in December 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Howard: The number of people unemployed in the United Kingdom on the seasonally adjusted, consistent, basis was 1,055,000 in December 1979 and 1,636,100 in December 1989.

Tourism (Northumberland)

16. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Northumbria tourist board to discuss the development of tourism in Northumberland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My noble Friend Viscount Ullswater, who has responsibility for tourism matters within the Department of Employment, met officers and members of the Northumbria tourist board yesterday. At that meeting he discussed with the board its strategy for the development of tourism in the region, and its plans for its future role.

Disabled People

19. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many responses he has received to his White Paper on employment and disability.

Mr. Jackson: By 30 November my Department had received 80 replies to the consultative document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

28. **Mr. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's policy towards the maintenance of the quota system for the employment of people with disabilities.

Mr. Jackson: This Department operates the quota system in line with its legal responsibilities. It seeks to underpin the legal requirements on employers by assisting them through the disablement advisory service to improve the effectiveness of employers' recruitment, retention and development policies for people with disabilities. In the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" we have asked for comments on the merits and demerits of the quota system.

Labour Statistics, Lambeth

20. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of insured workers in Lambeth SW2 and SW9 postal districts is unemployed.

Mr. Jackson: There are no official unemployment percentages calculated for postal districts. However, in October 1990 the numbers of unemployed claimants, not seasonally adjusted, in Lambeth SW2 and SW9 were 2,877 and 2,942 respectively.

Offshore Installations (Safety)

21. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association and relevant trade unions on the transfer of the safety responsibility of the Department of Energy to the Health and Safety Executive following the publication of the Cullen report into the Piper Alpha disaster.

Mr. Howard: Responsibility for offshore safety remains with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy until arrangements for an efficient transfer are completed. He has indicated that he is willing to have discussions with all those with something to contribute to improving North sea safety. I will adopt a similar approach. In addition, the structure and well-established procedures of the Health and Safety Commission will ensure that all relevant interests are consulted.

Tourism

22. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much overseas visitors to the United Kingdom spend per year.

Mr. Forth: During 1989, the last full year for which information is available, overseas visitors to the United Kingdom spent £6,945 million.

COSHH Regulations

23. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to improve the working of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Mr. Forth: The regulations have been in force for only just over 12 months are there are no reasons for considering any changes to the substance of the regulations. The Health and Safety Executive is monitoring their implementation and is continuing its substantial efforts to explain and enforce the regulations.

Stallite Batteries, Barnsley

24. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action the Health and Safety Executive intends to take over the recent ombudsman's report on Stallite Batteries, Barnsley.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) field organisation has been recently substantially changed as the result of internal efficiency reviews. This change, coupled with improvements to the administration of medical surveillance procedures introduced by HSE following its own internal investigation, have been acknowledged by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, in his report published on 31 October, as a satisfactory outcome to the complaint raised.

Training and Enterprise Councils

25. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice he gives to training and enterprise councils that are having difficulty meeting national standards of training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have had no representations from training and enterprise councils (TECs) that they are having difficulty meeting national standards of training. My Department is ready to offer advice to TECs on the national standards set out by industry.

EC Labour Statistics

26. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the countries in the European Community with a lower rate of unemployment than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard: Using the latest available internationally comparable figures, Portugal and Luxembourg have lower rates of unemployment than the United Kingdom. No figures are available for the unified Germany.

Wages (Underpayment)

27. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of prosecutions for the illegal underpayment of wages in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: In 1989, there were nine prosecutions under the Wages Act 1986 for the illegal underpayment of wages.

Special Needs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report, "Disability Employment and Training, Meeting a Demographic Challenge of the Nineties", produced jointly by SKILL and ILEA.

Mr. Jackson: My Department's library already has a copy of the report.

European Information Centres

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what financial support his Department currently provides for the European information centres in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The European information centre network is a European Commission initiative to which the United Kingdom contributes 18·7 per cent. of the budget. In addition, my Department has a small budget for co-ordinating bi-annual meetings of the United Kingdom centres and will also be contributing to the costs of a feasibility study for a national European information centre advertising campaign. My Department also financially supports one of the four pilot centres which is based with the small firms service in London.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what financial or other support his Department is planning in the future for United Kingdom European information centres.

Mr. Forth: My Department will continue to support the European information centres in the United Kingdom as outlined in my previous answer.

Action Credit

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the rate of unemployment and long-term unemployment defined as *(a)* continuously unemployed for a period of six months or more and *(b)* continuously unemployed for 12 months or more in the three areas chosen for the Training Agency's action credit pilot as pertaining in August 1989.

Mr. Jackson: The following information is available in the Library. Unemployment rates are not available for areas smaller than travel-to-work areas. Figures are given for the county of Avon and for the travel-to-work areas most closely approximating to the two other action credit pilot areas as at August 1989. The table shows the total numbers of unemployed claimants and the rate of unemployment and the number who have been unemployed for six months or more and 12 months or more for each area in October 1990, the latest available date. All figures are on the unadjusted basis.

	Total Unemployment	*Rate*	*6 months or more*	*12 months or more*
Avon County	23,421	4·7	10,255	6,182
Sunderland TTWA	19,130	10·4	9,700	6,282
Medway and Maidstone TTWA	10,915	4·4	4,032	2,078

Health and Safety

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what factors he lays down as essential for the attainment of improved health and safety at work.

Mr. Forth: Improving standards of health and safety at work requires the commitment of everyone concerned—employers, employees, the self-employed and so on—to comply with their duties under health and safety law. This demands a high degree of safety awareness at all levels, but especially among top management, and an effective management structure to ensure that health and safety risks are identified and appropriate measures taken to deal with those risks. There is no better introduction to the principles of health and safety than the executive's booklet "Essentials of Health and Safety at Work", revised earlier this year, and of which up to October 1990, 85,000 copies had been sold.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which Ministers have been responsible for health and safety at work since May 1979; and for how long each exercised the responsibility.

Mr. Jackson: The following Secretaries of State have had overall responsibility for health and safety at work within the Department:

	Dates	
Secretary of State	*From*	*To*
The Rt. Hon. James Prior	9 May 1979	14 September 1981
The Rt. Hon. Norman Tebbit	14 September 1981	17 October 1983
The Rt. Hon. Tom King	17 October 1983	2 September 1985
The Rt. Hon. Lord Young of Graffam	2 September 1985	12 June 1987
The Rt. Hon. Norman Fowler	15 June 1987	3 January 1990
The Rt. Hon. Michael Howard	4 January 1990	Present

In addition, Ministers who have had specific responsibility are listed in the table:

	Dates	
Minister	*From*	*To*
Patrick Mayhew	9 May 1979	5 January 1981
David Waddington	6 January 1981	7 January 1983
John Gummer	10 January 1983	10 September 1984
Peter Bottomley	11 September 1984	23 January 1986
David Trippier	24 January 1986	12 June 1987
Patrick Nicholls	15 June 1987	23 July 1989
Eric Forth	24 July 1989	Present

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of applications in industrial tribunals were first heard within 12, 16, 20 and 26 weeks, respectively, of the receipt of the application during the month of October.

Mr. Forth: The percentage of cases heard during October within 12, 16, 20 and 26 weeks respectively of the receipt of application were as follows:

Weeks	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*
12	35	49
16	59	70
20	75	83
26	89	88

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many members of the Health and Safety Executive staff are directly contributing to CEN technical committees and the related working groups;

(2) what representations he has received concerning the adequacy of the travel expenses being made available to allow the inspectors involved with CEN technical committees and related working groups to attend all meetings where standards are developed and set *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what sums have been made available by the Health and Safety Executive, in providing expenses for inspectors to travel in Europe to attend CEN standard-setting meetings;

(4) on what occasions, and in respect of which CEN committees or working groups, an inspector has been prohibited from attending a CEN meeting because expenses money is not available;

(5) which Health and Safety Executive national interest groups are involved with CEN technical committees and related working groups;

(6) what steps are taken to ensure that sufficient resources are made available so that Health and Safety Executive staff may attend all relevant CEN technical committees and relevant working groups;

(7) if he will list all the CEN technical committees and working groups which have been assessed as needing the involvement of the Health and Safety Executive;

(8) if he will make a statement on the priority given to the work of CEN in respect of ensuring good standards of machinery guarding, to protect workers from injury.

Mr. Forth: In the last few years the Health and Safety Executive has made a large contribution to the work of CEN and the other European bodies making standards important to health and safety at work. This it does by participation in British Standards Institute committees shadowing work in CEN and as part of the United Kingdom delegation to CEN from BSI. A few examples of areas covered include simple pressure vessels, personal protective equipment and in particular machinery safety, where HSE is very conscious of the need to maintain high levels of protection.

The importance HSE attaches to standards work is reflected in the growth in resources it has devoted to it, which has risen from around 27 staff years in 1988-89 to an estimated 50 staff years in 1990-91. Most of this increase is accounted for by the rapid growth in standards making in Europe, particularly by CEN.

Although standards are a significant element in the safety system they are not the only part nor necessarily the most important. When it became apparent that the current rate of growth in standards making in Europe in connection with the single market would lead to spending of 68 staff years in 1991-92, the HSE concluded that such a level could not be sustained without unacceptable damage to its other priorities for safety and health. The Health and Safety Commission subsequently decided that the resources committed to standards work should be held at around the present level of 58 staff years for 1991-92, and its reasons were published in its most recent plan of work, for 1990-91, and beyond.

The executive does not allocate a specific sum to CEN work nor identify costs in this way but exercises firm control over all time, travel and subsistence costs. The task of making standards, especially those needed for the single market is, of course, primarily one for industry and the Government have long been encouraging United Kingdom industry to increase its involvement. Controlling this growth in standards work means that individual members of the HSE will not be able to attend certain CEN meetings. I have received representations on this point, but it is absolutely right that the executive should set its own priorities for staff work. The HSE staff engaged in this work are people with scarce specialist skills which are in great demand to support the executive's general role. Conflicting demands on such resources always mean that priorities must be allocated: sometimes very worth while relevant activities have to take their place behind other more important tasks. Further, it is often the case that an acceptable alternative to attendance at CEN committees is for the executive to play an active role in the relevant BSI technical committees.

At present 50 individual staff are members of CEN/CENELEC technical committees and related working groups: there are many other staff taking an active part in BSI shadow committees, examining papers and providing support work. A list of the national interest groups involved with this CEN work is at table 1 and the CEN committees with which HSE is involved are at table 2.

Table 1

Health and Safety Executive National Interest Groups involved in CEN technical committees and related working groups

Agriculture—Livestock and Stationary Machinery
Agriculture—Crop Production
Agriculture—Forestry
Ceramics
Concrete
Cotton
Drinks and Packaging
Engineering "A"
Engineering "B"
Food
Glass
Molten Metals
Paper and Board
Plastics, Leather and Footwear
Printing
Quarries
Rubber
Woodworking
Wool

Table 2

CEN Committees with an HSE input

CEN BT 2
CEN BT 3
CEN PC 3
CEN TC 10
CEN TC 20
CEN TC 23
CEN TC 23 SC 1
CEN TC 23 SC 2

CEN TC 23 SC 3
CEN TC 33
CEN TC 45 WGE
CEN TC 48
CEN TC 49
CEN TC 53
CEN TC 54
CEN TC 58
CEN TC 61
CEN TC 62
CEN TC 68
CEN TC 69 WG 10
CEN TC 69 WG 10—2
CEN TC 69 WG 10—6
CEN TC 79
CEN TC 79 WG 7
CEN TC 85
CEN TC 85 WG 1
CEN TC 85 WG 3
CEN TC 85 WG 4
CEN TC 93
CEN TC 98
CEN TC 102
CEN TC 106
CEN TC 108
CEN TC 109
CEN TC 114
CEN TC 114 WG 1
CEN TC 114 WG 2
CEN TC 114 WG 3
CEN TC 114 WG 5
CEN TC 114 WG 6
CEN TC 114 WG 7
CEN TC 114 WG 8
CEN TC 114 WG 10
CEN TC 114 WG 11
CEN TC 114 WG 12
CEN TC 114 WG 15
CEN TC 119
CEN TC 121 WG 1
CEN TC 121 WG 2
CEN TC 121 WG 5A
CEN TC 121 WG 5B
CEN TC 121 WG 5B SWG 1
CEN TC 121 WG 5B SWG 2
CEN TC 121 WG 5B SWG 6
CEN TC 121 WG 7
CEN TC 122
CEN TC 122 WG 1
CEN TC 122 WG 2
CEN TC 122 WG 3
CEN TC 122 WG 6
CEN TC 124
CEN TC 128
CEN TC 129
CEN TC 131
CEN TC 135
CEN TC 137
CEN TC 137 WG 1
CEN TC 137 WG 2
CEN TC 138
CEN TC 140
CEN TC 142
CEN TC 143
CEN TC 144 WG 1
CEN TC 144 WG 2
CEN TC 144 WG 3
CEN TC 144 WG 6
CEN TC 144 WG 7
CEN TC 145
CEN TC 145 WG 1
CEN TC 145 WG 2
CEN TC 145 WG 3
CEN TC 145 WG 4
CEN TC 145 WG 6
CEN TC 145 WG 7
CEN TC 145 WG 8
CEN TC 146
CEN TC 146 WG 1
CEN TC 146 WG 2
CEN TC 146 WG 3
CEN TC 147
CEN TC 147 WG 1 M
CEN TC 147 WG 2 M
CEN TC 147 WG 4 C
CEN TC 147 WG 5 M
CEN TC 148
CEN TC 148 WG 1
CEN TC 148 WG 2
CEN TC 148 WG 3
CEN TC 148 WG 4
CEN TC 150
CEN TC 151
CEN TC 151 WG 4
CEN TC 151 WG 5
CEN TC 151 WG 6
CEN TC 151 WG 9
CEN TC 151 WG 10
CEN TC 152
CEN TC 153
CEN TC 155
CEN TC 157
CEN TC 158 WG 1
CEN TC 159
CEN TC 160
CEN TC 161
CEN TC 162
CEN TC 162 WG 2
CEN TC 162 WG 4
CEN TC 168
CEN TC 168 WG 1
CEN TC 168 WG 2
CEN TC 168 WG 3
CEN TC 179
CEN TC 180
CEN TC 181
CEN TC 182
CEN TC 188
CEN TC 196
CEN TC 196 WG 1
CEN TC 196 WG 2
CEN TC 196 WG 3
CEN TC 196 WG 5
CEN TC 196 WG 14
CEN TC 197
CEN TC 198
CEN TC 200
CEN TC 201
CEN TC 202 N 6
CEN TC 204
CEN TC 211
CEN TC 212
CEN TC 212 WG 3
CEN TC 214
CEN TC 214 WG 1
CEN TC 214 WG 4
CEN TC 231
CEN TC 231 WG 1
CEN TC 231 WG 2
CEN TC 233
CEN TC 234
CEN TC 235
CEN TC 236
CEN TC 237
CEN TC 238
CEN TC 265
CEN TC 266
CEN TC 267
CEN TC 268
CEN TC 269
CENELEC TC 17 A
CENELEC TC 17 B
CENELEC TC 17 D
CENELEC TC 26 A
CENELEC TC 26 B
CENELEC SC 31 WG 1
CENELEC SC 31 WG 2
CENELEC SC 31 WG 4
CENELEC SC 31 WG 6
CENELEC SC 31 WG 7

CENELEC SC 31 WG 8
CENELEC SC 31 WG 9
CENELEC SC 31 WG 11
CENELEC SC 31 WG 29
CENELEC TC 44 X
CENELEC TC 61
CENELEC TC 61 WG 20
CENELEC TC 61 F
CENELEC TC 64 A
CENELEC TC 74 X
CENELEC TC 104

TECs, Cheshire

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress he has made in setting up training and enterprise councils in Cheshire.

Mr. Jackson: Progress in setting up training and enterprise councils has been excellent. There are three TECs covering different parts of Cheshire. South and East Cheshire TEC has been fully operational since April 1990. The TEC covering Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Wirral is in development and due to become operational in April 1991, as is the TEC covering north and mid-Cheshire (NorMidTEC).

Strikes

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of strikes in August.

Mr. Forth: It is provisionally estimated that there were 54.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Jackson: The amount spent in each of the last five years by my Department is as follows:

	Press advertising £ million	*Television and radio advertising* £ million	*Other advertising and promotion* £ million
1985-86	n/a	n/a	n/a
1986-87	9·7	25·4	16·2
1987-88	7·5	20·9	14·4
1988-89	7·7	14·8	13·7
1989-90	7·8	8·1	14·2

Figures for press, television and radio and other advertising and promotion are not available separately for 1985-86.

Figures for the amount spent on promotional videos and sound cassettes are included in the "other advertising and promotion category" and could be separated out only at disproportionate cost.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Forth: Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the Central Unit on Purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to make an official visit to Nottingham to discuss the operation of his Department's programmes in the city.

Mr. Jackson: At present, neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have any plans to visit Nottingham. The Department operates a full range of employment, enterprise and training measures in Nottingham.

Deaf People (Interpreters)

Mr. Oakes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide funding for an interpreter service for the deaf within the Employment Service.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The Employment Service has recently published a summary paper on an evaluation of the special schemes which are designed to help remove specific barriers to work resulting from disabilities, together with a letter seeking comments. Any views on the funding of an interpreter service for deaf people in response to these consultations will be considered along with all other comments received.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 December 1990

ENERGY

Spent Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration he has given to the application of nuclear safeguards to spent nuclear fuel designated for direct disposal.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom applies the requirements of the international safeguards authorities to all civil spent nuclear fuel.

Electricity Privatisations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the breakdown of individual to institutional shareholders in the 12 regional electricity companies *(a)* on first dealings day and *(b)* one year hence.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Approximately 54·6 per cent. of the shares in each company have been made available to the general public and to employees and pensioners. The balance has been sold to United Kingdom and overseas institutions. Figures for a year hence are obviously not available.

TRANSPORT

Pelican Crossing, Kibworth

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to commence work on the A6 trunk road pelican crossing between Kibworth Harcourt and Kibworth Beauchamp in Leicestershire before Christmas.

Mr. Chope: I regret that it will not be possible for work to begin before spring 1991. But the detailed design is almost complete.

School Buses

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what examination his Department has made of the American example of stopping traffic when children are alighting from school buses; and whether he has any plans to introduce such a system in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chope: The Department has no wish to emulate the position in the United States of America where in spite of special regulations some 40 children are killed and 800 injured each year in school bus loading zones.

We do, however, intend to require school buses to display special signs and regulations will be made as soon as possible.

Belfast-Gatwick Air Route

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will seek to increase competition and service to customers on the Belfast-Gatwick air route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The pattern of services on individual routes is a matter for the commercial judgment of airlines, which may apply to the Civil Aviation Authority at any time for a licence in accordance with statutory procedures.

South Manchester Study

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make available to the public the south Manchester study which he commissioned in 1988.

Mr. Chope: No. The study was a background paper and not prepared for publication.

MFV Antares

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the structure and status of the proposed inquiry into the recent loss of the MFV Antares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The inquiry into the loss of MFV Antares, which is now well advanced, began on 23 November and was given the status of an inspector's inquiry, under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations, on 26 November. The inspectors appointed have extensive powers under the Merchant Shipping Acts, including the power to call witnesses before them, require witnesses to answer their questions and produce documents, and to carry out any examination of ships or equipment they deem necessary.

The inspectors will report to the chief inspector of marine accidents who will in turn report to the Secretary of State. The chief inspector's report will include the inspectors' findings and whatever recommendations he considers will help to avoid a similar accident in the future. The regulations require the report to be published unless the Secretary of State orders a formal investigation or there is good reason not to publish.

In addition, a Royal Navy inquiry is taking place; and there will be a fatal accident inquiry before the sheriff, in preparation for which the Strathclyde police is carrying out an investigation. All three groups of investigators—Royal Navy, police and inspectors—are fully co-operating with each other, but they will each arrive at their conclusions and make their respective reports independently.

Specialist Advisers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to increase the number of specialist advisers to his Department concerned with environmental and global warming issues.

Mr. McLoughlin: No.

M23 (Signals)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce the appointment of a consulting engineer to report on the design of traffic signals at junction 10 on the M23.

Mr. Chope: Tenders have been invited for the appointment of a consulting engineer to report on the traffic signals at junction 10 of the M23. The tender period closes on 21 December and the appointment will be made in the new year.

Speedlink Freight Service

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received from the chairman of British Rail about the future of the Speedlink freight service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail has today announced its plans following its consultations with Speedlink customers. I have arranged for a copy of the announcement to be placed in the Library of the House.

South Yorkshire Supertram

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement about the funding of the South Yorkshire Supertram project.

Mr. Freeman: The South Yorkshire passenger transport authority has now provided the assurances about the project to which I referred in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 28 November, column *406*. I have accordingly informed the authority that grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 together with credit approvals will be provided to enable it to implement the scheme.

Safety Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to change the law to make safety belts compulsory in minibuses used for the transport of children.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Minibuses first used on or after 1 October 1988 are already required to have seat belts fitted to all front seats. We have been pressing for agreement in the European Community to enable us to require the fitting of seat belts in all seats in minibuses. As a result, the European Commission is now committed to bringing forward proposals for consideration by the Community by the end of 1991.

HOME DEPARTMENT

International Friendship Club

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has had any representations about services offered by the International Friendship Club, of Regents park, Southampton, in the context of immigration by Filipino citizens; and whether he has any proposals to curb efforts by such agencies to obtain fees from United Kingdom citizens for these services.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government receive representations from time to time about the activities of international marriage agencies but have received no specific representation about International Friendship Club. Such agencies neither have nor confer any special status: they and overseas national using their services have at all times to observe the requirement of the immigration rules. There are no present plans for legislation.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many expatriates have now had a vote registered in the United Kingdom under the 1989 Act; and if he will give a breakdown of the countries where they are now resident, following the publication of new draft electoral registers for 1991-92.

Mrs. Rumbold: Lists of overseas electors were published by individual electoral registration officers on 28 November. We shall make the figures known to the House in due course. A breakdown of the number of overseas electors by country of residence could be published only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many firearm certificates were currently valid in each police authority area of England, Scotland and Wales for 1988, 1989, and 1990, respectively;

(2) how many shotgun certificates were currently valid in each police authority area in England, Scotland and Wales for 1988, 1989 and 1990, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: The number of firearm and shotgun certificates on issue on 31 December of both 1988 and 1989 is shown for each police authority in England and Wales in tables 2 and 4 of Home Office statistical bulletins 18/89 and 26/90. A copy of these bulletins is in the Library.

Figures for 1990 are not yet available. I am informed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that the number of firearm and shotgun certificates on issue on 31 December of both 1988 and 1989 was as follows:

Number of firearm and shotgun certificates in Scottish police force areas 1988 and 1989

	Number of certificates			
	1988		*1989*	
Police force area	*Firearm*	*Shotgun*	*Firearm*	*Shotgun*
Central Scotland	1,380	4,837	1,364	4,626
Dumfries and Galloway	3,033	6,702	2,637	6,496
Fife	1,801	6,307	1,754	6,152
Grampian	6,183	14,221	6,144	14,132
Lothian and Borders	4,575	12,494	4,418	12,256
Northern	9,928	13,696	8,037	13,391
Strathclyde	6,642	21,116	5,513	20,167
Tayside	4,799	10,120	3,673	9,829
Total in Scotland	38,341	89,493	33,540	87,049

Note: Figures are at 31 December each year.

Road Fund Licence Discs

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire on the outcome of the latest survey carried out in the Southampton area on display of road fund licence discs by motorists.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that Hampshire constabulary, in conjunction with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, conducted a vehicle excise campaign in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight between 1 and 30 November. Information about the outcome of the campaign is not yet available because offence reports are still being processed.

Game Licences

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many game licences were issued in the 1989-90 season; and what were the net revenues to his Department from the issue of such licences.

Mrs. Rumbold: 47,432 game licences were issued in Great Britain in the financial year 1989-90 and £245,812 was raised in revenue. The costs of issuing game licences are borne by the Home Office and came to a total of £172,406, but the revenue passes to local authorities.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 27 November in relation to the proposal for a directive on data protection from the European Commission.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that this meeting was cancelled and that the draft directive is not on the agenda for the Council's meeting later this month.

Convicted Murderers

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted murderers have committed further murders after being released from a prison sentence for that offence; and how many people have been murdered by such ex-prisoners since 1965.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the number of persons convicted of murder who had previous murder convictions is published annually in Criminal Statistics, England and Wales—table 4.10 of the latest issue, for 1989, Cm. 1322—copies of which are available in the Library.

During the period from 1946 to 1989, 10 persons in England and Wales were convicted of a second murder after previously being convicted of murder and being released on life licence. In addition, one person was convicted of murder in England and Wales, released, and was then convicted of a second murder in Scotland and one person was convicted of murder in England and Wales, released, and was then convicted of a murder in prison in Northern Ireland.

Since the abolition of the death penalty in 1965, there have been eight persons in England and Wales who have been murdered by persons previously convicted of murder. Of those previous murder convictions, four were committed before abolition of the death penalty; only one of the others might have attracted the death penalty under the terms of the Homicide Act 1957. In addition, one person was murdered in Scotland by a person who had previously been convicted of murder in England and Wales, and one person was murdered in Northern Ireland by a person who had previously been convicted of murder in England and Wales.

Racism

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received a copy of the European Parliament's report on "Xenophobia and Racism"; and what response he intends to make.

Mrs. Rumbold: The report of the European Parliament's committee of inquiry into racism and xenophobia was received in September and its recommendations are being studied.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applicants for asylum in the United Kingdom have been held in detention for longer than three months in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1990;

(2) how many people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom have been detained in Her Majesty's prisons for more than seven days since *(a)* 1 January 1989 and *(b)* 1 June 1990;

(3) how many people by nationality were held in detention on the first day in each month in 1990 pending their seeking asylum.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. On 7 December, 51 persons who had claimed asylum had been detained under Immigration Act powers for three months or more.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are currently employed in the asylum and special cases division of the immigration and nationality department; how many of these are processing applications for asylum; and what were the comparable figures in each of the preceding five years.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the staff complement at the Home Office refugee unit in each year since 1980.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Figures are not available for years before 1984. In subsequent years the number of staff in post or in training dealing with asylum matters was as follows:

	Numbers
1 April 1984	39
1 October 1985	48
1 October 1986	47
1 October 1987	52
1 October 1988	57
1 October 1989	67
6 December 1990	100

The figures for 1990 include three senior managers, two personal secretaries, and three members of the research unit, none of whom is directly engaged in processing applications; a similar number of staff were engaged in these duties in previous years. The asylum and special cases division, which was established as a separate division on 12 November 1990, is also responsible for the issue of Home Office travel documents and re-entry visas on which 17·6 staff are employed, in addition to those dealing with asylum matters.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specialist training relating to asylum issues is given, upon appointment, to officials in the public inquiry office of the immigration and nationality department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Staff in the public inquiry office receive training which lasts about 11 weeks. The course

covers immigration law and practice, interviewing and communication skills and customer care. No specialist training on asylum policy is given as the staff in the public inquiry office do not take decisions in such cases. Their role in asylum cases is confined to receiving applications and interviewing applicants to obtain details of their claim on behalf of the asylum and special cases division who provide guidance on specific geographical areas as necessary.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish all written instructions for officials dealing with asylum applications, including immigration officers and officials in the public inquiry office and refugee unit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It is not the usual practice to publish such internal management instructions.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether written reasons of refusal of asylum are given, at the time of refusal, to those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom who are refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Written reasons are given only when the applicant is to be removed to the country in which he claims to fear persecution.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to ensure that the procedures used by his Department for dealing with applications for asylum in the United Kingdom comply with internationally recognised standards for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am satisfied that asylum procedures in my Department meet the United Kingdom's obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to recover sums due by airlines under the Immigration (Carriers' Liabilities) Act 1987; how much has been received to date; how much is outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of £22·792 million had been incurred by carriers—that is, airlines and sea operators —to 13 November 1990. Of this sum, £8·135 million had been paid and £1·142 million waived on the basis of representations in individual cases, leaving £13·515 million outstanding.

Vigorous action is being taken to enforce payment of outstanding liabilities. In July, writs were issued against four airlines; three have since settled out of court. In October and November final demand letters were sent to all carriers with outstanding debts. These have produced a mixture of payments, promises of payment and requests for urgent meetings. Early meetings are being arranged, where requested, to discuss the scope for resolution without recourse to the courts. But the Treasury Solicitor will be instructed to institute civil recovery proceedings where payment or satisfactory proposals for payment are not forthcoming promptly.

Refugee Unit

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specialist training is given, upon appointment, to officials in the Home Office refugee unit; what follow-up training is given to such officials; and if he intends to take steps to improve such training.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Officials in the asylum and special cases division of the Home Office specialise in geographical areas and they are trained by working under close supervision on individual cases; additional training on general determination matters is being developed with UNHCR; and seminars are held on particular geographical areas with outside academics.

Bradford Magistrates Court

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for facilities at Bradford magistrates court to be extended to include a creche, interpreters, and refreshments.

Mr. John Patten: It is for the Bradford magistrates courts committee, in consultation with its paying authority, to decide whether to pursue the provision of creche facilities. I understand that arrangements for interpretation are already in place, and that there is a restaurant at the court house which provides refreshments thoughout the day.

Prisoners (Suicide)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans (i) to strengthen the efforts made by the prison service to prevent suicides by inmates and (ii) to ensure that the families of inmates who die in custody receive the support which they require following the death.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I regard suicide and self-injury in prison as an extremely serious problem. I have asked the Director General of the Prison Service to give very high priority to it. Prison staff already make very considerable efforts to identify and care for inmates at risk, but I want to ensure that the necessary lessons are learned from past tragedies and consistently applied in future. The recent reorganisation of the prison service has presented the opportunity to reinforce existing guidance and secure more effective implementation of the prevention strategy set out in circular instruction 20/1989. Under a new addendum to CI 20/1989, area managers and governors are being required to institute more regular and thorough reviews of the measures being taken at their establishments. The suicide prevention management group within the establishment will be mainly responsible for such reviews: a thorough checklist of suicide prevention measures has been issued to ensure that all aspects of this complex and distressing problem are properly tackled.

In addition, governors are being given fresh guidance in circular instruction 52/1990 on support for bereaved families. Wherever practicable, visits will be made to close relatives of deceased inmates to offer sympathy, to respond to their questions and concerns and to pass on information, as appropriate, about specialised counselling and support services in the community.

I am conscious, too, of the traumatic effects which suicides can have on prison staff, particularly those who

had responsibilities for the care and supervision of the inmate concerned. CI 52/1990 also stresses the need for support to be given to any member of staff who may need it.

The addendum to CI 20/1989, together with CI 52/1990, will be issued tomorrow, 13 December, under cover of a letter to managers in the prison service from the Director of Inmate Administration and the Director of Prison Medical Services. Copies of all these documents are being placed in the Library.

We shall be reviewing our suicide prevention policies in the light of the report on this subject by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons which will be published very shortly.

WALES

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many open heart operations have been undertaken this year at the University hospital of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I understand from South Glamorgan health authority that 544 open heart operations were undertaken at the University hospital of Wales between 1 January and 30 November this year.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide the capital allocation his Department is making in the current financial year to enable South Glamorgan health authority to reach its target of open heart operations to be performed yearly at the University hospital of Wales as a regional service.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As part of the Department's continuing commitment to increasing the number of open heart operations per year capable of being achieved by the University hospital of Wales, capital allocations of approximately £1·2 million are being made available to South Glamorgan health authority in the current financial year for adult cardiac services and £1·5 million for paediatric cardiac services.

Work in the course of the current financial year to enhance cardiac service facilities at the University hospital of Wales has included upgraded catheter laboratories, additional intensive care facilities and a new paediatric cardiac unit at a cost to central funds of some £4 million. Our officials are currently discussing with South Glamorgan DHA further developments to ensure that targets are reached.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to Clwyd health authority and South Glamorgan health authority of referring patients for open heart surgery outside Wales between 1 April and 31 October this year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I understand from Clwyd health authority that the cost of referrals between 1 April and 31 October this year was approximately £160,000 and from South Glamorgan health authority that the costs were in the region of £260,000.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the target date by which 120 open heart operations will be undertaken on children at the University hospital of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Building work on the paediatric cardiac unit at the University hospital of Wales having been completed, the unit is being commissioned to come into service during 1991. The date by which capacity will be approached will depend upon the nature and timing of referrals.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the organisations in Wales which have received funding to help the development of local programmes within Welsh counties to combat alcohol misuse; and if he will give the amount given to each organisation for 1990-91 and the figure projected for each organisation for the 1991-92 financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No allocations have yet been made. Allocations will be made early in the new year.

Epilepsy

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to provide financial support to the Wales Epilepsy Association to enable it to develop services of advice, guidance and support network for epileptics and their families throughout Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Health and social services authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their local populations and for securing such services as they feel are appropriate to meet them.

The Wales Epilepsy Association has submitted an application for financial assistance in support of headquarters and project development costs under section 64 of the Health and Public Services Act 1968. I am shortly to see a delegation from the association, led by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) to discuss their work. A decision on the application for section 64 funding will be made as soon as possible in the light of our consideration of all applications made for the available funds.

Snowdonia National Park

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to protect the environment of Snowdonia national park from acidification caused by the burning of orimulsion fuel at Ince power station.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

There has been no increase in sulphur dioxide emissions from Ince power station as a result of the burning of orimulsion. Under agreements made between Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and Powergen, the operators of Ince, less than half of the station's 1,000 megawatts capacity is being used for the burning of orimulsion. Power production from the remaining 500 MW boiler has been curtailed to keep the sulphur dioxide emissions within the previous level for the plant as a whole.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the operator of every large combustion plant will be required to apply to HMIP by 1 May 1991 for an authorisation to continue operating the plant. In setting conditions in an authorisation, HMIP must aim to ensure the use of batneec to prevent or minimise releases of prescribed substances including SO2, and compliance with any plans set by the Secretary of State. These will include the plan for

implementation of the large combustion plants directive. The Government's proposals for this will require substantial overall reductions in emissions of SO2 from Powergen's plants.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the percentage increase in investment each year since 1979 in real terms in *(a)* chemicals, *(b)* man-made fibres, *(c)* textiles, *(d)* clothing, *(e)* footwear, *(f)* motor-vehicle manufacturing and *(g)* mechanical engineering: to what extent this has resulted in an increase in capacity; what has been the increase in the demand for such goods; and whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing in each case the increase in capacity since 1979, the increase in output as a percentage of 1979 and the figures for import penetration from the EEC and the rest of the world now and in 1979.

Mr. Leigh: The available information is shown in the tables: 1989 data are not yet available. Investment figures in real price terms are a matter for the Treasury. Statistics on capacity are not available.

United Kingdom demand: percentage changes

Per cent.

	1980-1979	*1981-1980*	*1982-1981*	*1983-1982*	*1984-1983*	*1985-1984*	*1986-1985*	*1987-1986*	*1988-1987*
(a) Chemicals (SIC 25)	−2	+7	+7	+14	+12	+4	+2	+13	+11
(b) Man-made Fibres (SIC 26)	−28	+4	−3	+8	+11	+7	+14	+15	−1
(c) Textiles (SIC 43)	−11	+2	+7	+15	+12	+8	+6	+7	+6
(d) Clothing (SIC 453)	0	−1	+9	+8	+15	+10	+9	+5	+8
(e) Footwear (SIC 451)	0	+3	+7	+9	+12	+9	+10	+6	+7
(f) Motor Vehicle Manufacturing (SIC 35)	−11	−5	+21	+16	+7	+16	+14	+18	+24
(g) Mechanical Engineering (SIC 32)	0	−4	+13	+12	+8	+8	+6	+10	+18

United Kingdom output: percentage changes on 1979

Per cent.

	1980-1979	*1981-1979*	*1982-1979*	*1983-1979*	*1984-1979*	*1985-1979*	*1986-1979*	*1987-1979*	*1988-1979*
(a) Chemicals (SIC 25)	+3	+9	+15	+28	+43	+53	+56	+72	+88
(b) Man-made Fibres (SIC 26)	−18	−29	−36	−25	−15	−13	−10	−3	+2
(c) Textiles (SIC 43)	−8	−12	−8	0	+10	+20	+24	+31	+36
(d) Clothing (SIC 453)	0	−5	+2	+10	+22	+37	+46	+50	+56
(e) Footwear (SIC 451)	+2	−4	−2	+2	+10	+24	+35	+40	+47
(f) Motor Vehicle Manufacturing (SIC 35)	−3	−9	−4	0	+9	+26	+36	+69	+98
(g) Mechanical Engineering (SIC 32)	+6	+3	+12	+13	+22	+32	+36	+45	+62

Import penetration from the E.C. and the rest of the world

	1980 *Import Penetration*		*1988* *Import Penetration*	
	E.C. *per cent.*	*Rest of World* *per cent.*	*E.C.* *per cent.*	*Rest of World* *per cent.*
(a) Chemicals (SIC 25)	18	10	30	11
(b) Man-made Fibres (SIC 26)	36	20	53	13
(c) Textiles (SIC 43)	18	17	27	21
(d) Clothing (SIC 453)	9	19	14	26
(e) Footwear (SIC 451)	22	13	20	28
(f) Motor Vehicle Manufacturing (SIC 35)	30	9	37	14
(g) Mechanical Engineering (SIC 32)	18	11	26	13

Notes:
1. The sectors are defined in terms of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), and the code references are shown in brackets.
2. United Kingdom demand is defined in terms of output (i.e. United Kingdom manufacturers' product sales) plus imports, less exports.
3. The import penetration figures are defined as imports from the E.C., or the Rest of the World, as a percentage of United Kingdom demand. Both 1980 and 1988 E.C. figures relate to imports from the current 11 member states (i.e. including Spain and Portugal). 1980 figures are given, as 1979 figures are not available in this form.
4. The percentage changes in demand and output are in current price terms.

Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

Consumer Guarantees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for requiring consumer guarantees to be enforceable beyond the life of the company issuing them.

Mr. Leigh: The Government have no proposals for such legislation. The enforcement of long-term guarantees was considered by the Director General of Fair Trading in his report on consumer guarantees (June 1986). The report makes a number of recommendations on good practice and indicates that the Office of Fair Trading will keep this matter under review to see whether voluntary initiatives by industry can bring about improvements.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for making guarantees issued on goods sold a liability to be taken into account by the Official Receiver on liquidation.

Mr. Redwood: The insolvency legislation—rule 13.12 of the insolvency rules 1986—already provides that contingent debts or liabilities that materialise after a company has gone into liquidation by reason of an obligation incurred before that date are provable claims in the proceedings. This in effect means that claims under valid guarantees are taken into account by the liquidator.

Auditing Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which auditing firms would be banned from conducting public opinion polls for their audit clients.

Mr. Redwood: I see no reason for doing so. Under part II of the Companies Act 1989, the recognised supervisory bodies must have adequate rules and practices to ensure that company audit work is conducted properly and with integrity, and that persons are not appointed as company auditors in circumstances in which they have any interest likely to conflict with the proper conduct of the audit.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will propose legislation under which auditors would be prevented from issuing a disclaimer of opinion.

Mr. Redwood: No. Circumstances of fundamental uncertainty may occasionally arise in which the auditor is unable to form an opinion one way or the other on whether a set of accounts gives a true and fair view. In such circumstances, it is better that an auditor should decline to give an opinion than that he should be forced to give one which cannot, on the evidence available, be justified and could therefore be misleading.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements applicants for supervisory body status under the Companies Act have offered to enable a member of the public to ascertain whether an auditor *(a)* has derived 15 per cent. or more of his fee from any one client and *(b)* has lent money to an audit client.

Mr. Redwood: All the applications that we have received for recognition as supervisory bodies include guidance to the effect that an auditor should not lend money to an audit client, and should not in normal circumstances derive more than 15 per cent. of his fee income from one client.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of company accounts are lodged on time; what efforts are made to pursue late reports; and what studies he has carried out of the correlation between late reporting and subsequent company failures.

Mr. Redwood: Of the company accounts accepted by Companies house during the financial year 1989-90, 54 per cent. of those filed by public companies and 53 per cent. of those filed by private companies were received by the due date. A further 25 per cent. of public and 20 per cent. of private company accounts came in within three months of the due date. If accounts are not submitted within the statutory period allowed, a series of letters are issued. Action taken by Companies house can result in prosecution of the individual directors. There have been no studies carried out on the correlation between late reporting and subsequent company failure.

Single European Act

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the expected gains and losses to the United Kingdom expected under the Single European Act; what assessment has been made of the benefits to date; and if he will publish a table showing the current account balance on visible and invisible trade with the EEC in each of the past five years together with the forecast for this year and next.

Mr. Redwood: The single market is expected to raise the level of income in the European Community by removing the remaining barriers to trade between member states. The Cecchini report published by the European Commission in 1988 sets out the range of expected benefits to the Community as a whole. Projections for the United Kingdom are contained in table A 4.4 on page 622 of volume 2 of the report "Research on the cost of non-Europe—Basic findings—Studies on the economics of integration", which is available in the library. The benefits which ultimately accrue to the United Kingdom from the completion of the single market will depend crucially on the response of firms to the opportunities and challenges which it presents.

Figures on the United Kingdom's visible and invisible trade with the Community can be obtained from table 10.1 of "The Pink Book" United Kingdom Balance of Payments, which is also available in the Library. No forecasts are made for the trade balance with the Community.

Weights and Measures

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to increase the number of qualified inspectors of weights and measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Inspectors of weights and measures are employed by the local weights and measures authorities and it is the responsibility of each of these authorities to recruit, train and retain sufficient qualified inspectors to enforce consumer protection legislation in their area.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department; and *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Leigh: My Department uses the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully

qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. The current total number of staff working for DTI is 12,345.

Defence Equipment Licensing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what safeguards exist in the defence equipment licensing system to cover dual-use machinery.

Mr. Lilley: Industrial machinery which is capable of use for defence purposes (dual use) is subject to export licensing in the same way as defence equipment.

Export Controls

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions he and his ministerial colleagues have met representatives of industry to discuss licence applications for goods under the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1987.

Mr. Lilley: I and my ministerial colleagues meet representatives of industry frequently to discuss many subjects, including export licence applications.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of his Department's handling of export licence applications by the firms, Walter Somers Ltd. and Sheffield Forgemasters Ltd.

Mr. Lilley: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my hon. Friend on 29 November at column 1060.

Environment Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department was represented at, or provided information and documentation for, the conference on recycling in the future, organised by the Institute of Waste Management on 4 December.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* My Department was invited to participate in the conference on recycling in the future on 4 December, but was unable to attend due to other commitments. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment spoke at the conference.

Insolvency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received proposing the introduction of procedures equivalent to chapter II of the United States bankruptcy code into British insolvency law.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* I have received no such representations. The effectiveness of United States procedures is sometimes discussed with officials of the Insolvency Service Executive Agency by some of those who are interested in the development of insolvency policy.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to review the working of the Insolvency Act.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The working of the Insolvency Act 1986 is kept under review by the Insolvency Service Executive Agency.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The information is as follows:

£000's[1]

	A Press Advertising	*B Television and Radio Advertising*	*C Other promotional materials*	*D Films Audio-visual Slides*
1985-86	1,216	—	877	242
1986-87	987	3	1,008	44
1987-88	3,417	5,721	1,501	263
1988-89	4,300	13,575	4,800	818
1989-90	5,656	5,900	11,353	739

[1] Figures for 1985-86—1988-89 relate to the Department's central publicity budget. The figure for 1989-90 includes expenditure by divisions which is in addition to that carried by the central publicity budget.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the central unit on purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Reports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *184*, if he will place in the Library the Department of Trade and Industry reports listed along with the reports listed in the answers of 1 November, *Official Report*, column *657*, 25 October, *Official Report*, column *272*, 21 February, *Official Report*, column *789* and 19 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns *138-39*.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* All reports to which the hon. Member refers are available in the Library.

Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many approaches were made to his Department by Walter Somers querying the Iraqi order for equipment in respect of the supergun.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Three: two directly and one indirectly on its behalf.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the technical specifications

of the steel ordered for the pipes intended for Iraq that were the subject of correspondence between his Department and Sheffield Forgemasters in July 1988.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* No. It is not the practice to reveal details of individual licensing inquiries.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department took when it was first made aware of the pipeline equipment built in the United Kingdom for Iraq having possible military implications.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* When the military implications of the equipment became clear the Department responsible for taking action was HM Customs and Excise. That Department acted with commendable swiftness to prevent the export of the equipment.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date his Department first became aware that an Iraqi export order was for military equipment.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* My Department first became aware that the Iraqi export order for steel tubes was for military equipment in April this year.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether officials of his Department made any statement or communication to the press prior to 18 April indicating his Department's opinion on whether the pipes impounded on Teesside by Her Majesty's Customs were for military purposes.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* No.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when his Department saw the contract involving Sheffield Forgemasters for the Iraqi order;

(2) whether, on receipt of the Forgemasters contract for the Iraqi order placed in 1988, his Department called for any further information from the company.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* My Department has not seen the contract to which the questions refer.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the Government's shareholding via British Steel in Sheffield Forgemasters when the order for the Iraqi gun was first placed with Forgemasters.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* In June 1988 the Government's shareholding via British Steel in Sheffield Forgemasters was 50 per cent.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the day on which his Department was first made aware of the military implications of the Iraqi contract with Sheffield Forgemasters and Walter Somers.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* My Department was first made aware of the military implications of the Iraqi contract with Sheffield Forgemasters and Walter Somers in April of this year.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters his Department sent in 1988 to Forgemasters about whether an export licence for the Iraqi contract was required; and what were the Department's conclusions on this matter.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* One letter was sent; on the basis of information provided by the company it was concluded that no licence was required.

PRIME MINISTER

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to raise the amendment conference of the 1963 partial nuclear test ban treaty, to be held in January 1991, when he meets the President of the United States.

The Prime Minister: We consult with the United States Administration on the partial test ban treaty at all levels.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to attend the opening session of the amendment conference of the partial test ban treaty in New York in January 1991.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to attend the partial test ban treaty amendment conference.

AIDS

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will reconvene the Cabinet committee reviewing AIDS.

The Prime Minister: The Government will continue to pursue vigorously a strategy for dealing with AIDS, but I have no plans to establish a Cabinet committee specifically to consider AIDS issues.

Israel

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with Prime Minister Shamir.

The Prime Minister: I had a useful first meeting with Mr. Shamir. We discussed bilateral and regional issues including the immediate issue of the Gulf crisis, as well as the longer term issue of the Arab-Israel dispute.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Curry: This Department has access to the services of the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices

throughout the United Kingdom. The Department, including its agencies, has 10,632 employees in total, none of whom is employed to provide occupational health services.

Pesticides

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the potential replacement of pesticides by mycoherbicides in respect of control of fungal diseases; what research his Department is presently undertaking or sponsoring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Mycoherbicides are fungi which are used to control weeds; they are not capable of controlling fungal diseases.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet his European colleagues to draw up plans to distribute the EEC's food surpluses to the Soviet Union in the form of aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: No formal USSR request for food aid has yet been received by the Government. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs indicated at the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December, the Government are ready to participate fully in any Community response to real shortages in the USSR to ensure food aid reaches those genuinely in need.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 10 and 11 December.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council together with my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), Parliamentary Secretary in my Department.

Agreement was reached on a directive laying down the principles covering veterinary checks on meat and other animal products entering the Community from third countries and laying down rules on the definition of vermouths. These were satisfactory for the United Kingdom.

Ministers agreed in principle to extend for a year the ban on the use of bovine somatotropin (BST) in the Community pending the results of relevant scientific experiments. This is a sensible approach which is expected to be formally agreed when the relevant Commission proposal comes forward which is expected to be very soon.

I took the opportunity to press the Commission to take steps to ensure that east European suppliers respect minimum prices when exporting soft fruit to the Community. The Commissioner showed sympathy with this request.

There was a discussion on the GATT round following the disappointing conclusion to the conference in Brussels last week. I pushed hard for a united Community position which provided a sufficient envelope for the Commission to be able to negotiate a satisfactory arrangement on agriculture which, as all recognise, would be a vital component in any final settlement.

THE ARTS

Arts Expenditure (Scotland)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister for the Arts what has been the Government's total expenditure on the arts in Scotland for each of the past five years and as a total over the same period.

Mr. Renton: Government funding for the arts in Scotland is channelled through the Scottish Arts Council. Over the past five years the annual grant to the council has been as follows:

	£
1990-91	17,451,000
1989-90	15,732,000
1988-89	15,358,000
1987-88	14,237,000
1986-87	13,584,000
Total	76,362,000

In addition, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland funds a small number of performing arts organisations directly.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Community (Economic Benefits)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies have been undertaken to examine the net economic benefits to the United Kingdom of membership of the European Community.

Mr. Maude: Useful bibliographies of studies on some of the key policy issues can be found in various editions of the EC publication "European Economy".

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what increase in income tax would be required if the whole of the additional cost of transferring the total teachers' pay bill to the Exchequer was to be met from this source of revenue.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 26 November 1990]:* Local education authorities in the United Kingdom are likely to spend nearly £10 billion on teachers' pay in 1990-91. The additional cost to central Government of transferring the responsibility for that spending would depend on the extent to which there was a reduction in the grant paid to local authorities.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be raised from treating all taxable benefits in kind as earnings for national insurance contributions in 1991-92.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* For 1991-92 it is estimated to be £750 million. This estimate is based on projections of data relating to 1987-88 and is provisional.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the central unit on purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Football

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the response from the football authorities to the Sports Minister's recent call for one body to represent both the Football League and Football Association.

Mr. Atkins: I understand that the Football Association council is to consider the proposals made by the Football League for a joint board of management at its meeting on 14 January. I welcome any constructive proposals for greater unity between the two bodies but the details of how this is achieved are matters for the football authorities.

Cricket

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is considering to promote the game of cricket in the community.

Mr. Atkins: The Sports Council already runs a number of schemes aimed at developing sport in the community. In announcing the council's grant in aid for 1991-92 I asked it to pay attention to developing initiatives for young people in partnership with cricket clubs and I know that they are now working up detailed proposals. I am also in touch with the Test and County Cricket Board, the National Cricket Association, the English Schools Cricket Association and the Marylebone Cricket Club on a regular basis to discuss these matters.

School Premises

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the organisations to be consulted in the review of the School Premises Regulations announced on 2 October; and when the consultation process is likely to begin.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 28 November, at column *421*, regarding timing of consultations for the review. The list of consultees has not yet been finalised.

School Meals

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what the average cost of a school meal is in 1990 in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools.

Mr. Fallon: In January 1990 the average cost[1] of a school meal in England was:

	Fixed charge[2] *Pence*	*Authorised spend*[3] *Pence*
Primary schools[4]	68	68
Secondary schools	72	74

[1] This is the simple average of the most common charge reported by individual local education authorities.
[2] This applies to dining centres.
[3] This applies to a cash cafeteria service.
[4] Includes nursery schools.

Research Councils

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) of 19 November, *Official Report*, column *30*, he will make a further statement on his meeting with the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on priorities for United Kingdom science.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend will hold this meeting after he has received the board's advice on the allocation of the science budget for 1991-92 and later years, which is expected shortly.

Postgraduates (Fees)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the tuition fee met under the awards arrangements for postgraduate students in the academic year 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The maximum tuition fee reimbursed through the awards system for eligible home students and those from other European Community countries on full-time postgraduate courses will be increased from £1,985 in the current academic year to £2,104 in 1991-92. As for tuition fees for students on first degree and equivalent courses, fees will be paid in three termly instalments.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Medical Research Council for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Medical Research Council has submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend its 1989-90 annual report under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and we are placing a copy before the House today.

We were very interested to read of the good progress made in the year, and to learn about work in areas of current public concern such as AIDS research—where the council continues to work towards the development of effective vaccines and drugs to limit the progress of the disease. I was greatly encouraged that the council's income from contracts with industry has increased from £4·4 million in 1987-88 to £6·1 million in 1989-90, and that royalty income has more than doubled over the same period. I congratulate the MRC laboratory of molecular biology for winning, jointly with Cambridge Research Biochemicals, the Queen's award for technological achievement as a result of a successful collaboration on the generation of improved peptides.

I congratulate the council on these and other achievements and look forward to reading about further advances in next year's report.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Caribbean Countries (Aid)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the amount of bilateral aid per capita for each of the Caribbean countries, including Guyana.

Mrs. Chalker: Following are the figures for the latest available year:

	1. United Kingdom bilateral aid to Caribbean countries in 1989		*2. Bilateral aid per capita*[1]
	Total £'000s	*(of which CDC project aid expenditure)*	*£*
Anguilla	1,997	—	249·61
Antigua and Barbuda	757	—	9·01
Bahamas	30	—	0·12
Barbados	285	—	1·12
Belize	3,786	(1,472)	20·80
Bermuda	39	—	0·69
British Virgin Islands	4,448	(2,200)	317·73
Cayman Islands	1,305	(1,299)	62·14
Dominica	2,493	—	30·77
Dominican Republic	25	—	—
Grenada	1,352	—	13·25
Guadeloupe	0	—	—
Guyana	6,561	—	8·21
Haiti	0	—	—
Jamaica	20,304	(16,639)	8·36
Martinique	0	—	—
Montserrat	4,044	—	337·02
Netherlands Antilles	0	—	—
St. Kitts-Nevis	711	—	16·52
St. Lucia	8,872	(5,500)	61·19
St. Vincent	1,091	—	8·95
Trinidad and Tobago	640	(295)	0·52
Turks and Caicos Islands	5,240	—	748·51

[1] 1988 population figures used: 1989 not yet available.

Least-developed Countries

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the least-developed countries will benefit from the new initiatives related to aid procurement and local cost rules which were announced at the second United Nations conference on the least-developed countries in Paris in September.

Mrs. Chalker: Allowing least developed countries to which we provide aid to use some of our aid funds to procure from other poor countries, as well as from the United Kingdom, should make a positive contribution to trade between developing countries and help to achieve good value for money from the aid programme.

The removal of limits on the extent to which our bilateral financial aid to the least developed countries can be used to meet local costs should give added flexibility in ensuring that our aid meets the most pressing needs of recipients.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of gross national product is currently spent on aid to the least-developed countries; and if he has any plans to raise this to meet the United Nations targets for such spending.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1989 Britain's net official development assistance to the 42 countries presently classified by the United Nations as least developed was 0·10 per cent. of GNP. In the programme of action adopted by the Second UN Conference on the least developed held in Paris on 3-14 September 1990 no target applicable to all donors was established. The UK along with several other donors undertook to make our best efforts to reach the previously agreed UN target of 0·15 per cent. Over 60 per cent. of our bilateral aid in 1989 was provided to the poorest fifty countries.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the criteria by which the least-developed countries are adjudged to meet the requirements of good governance.

Mrs. Chalker: The criteria for least developed countries are the same as for other recipients of our aid. They were set out in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech to the Overseas Development Institute of 6 June.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the second United Nations conference on the least-developed countries held in Paris in September.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 29 October 1990, which said:

"The Government welcome the outcome of the second United Nations conference on the least developed held in Paris from 3-14 September and will support those least developed countries which implement the policies outlined in the programme of action.

The British delegation to the conference was led by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. The Delegation played an active and positive role in the negotiations for the programme of action for the 1990s adopted by the Conference. Two new British initiatives relating to aid tying and local costs rules, which will be of direct benefit to the least developed countries, were announced at the conference. The delegation kept in close contact with British non-governmental organisations, both before and during the conference. The booklet 'LLDCs in the 1990s: Development or Oblivion' was taken into account in formulating the United Kingdom position on the various issues."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. *361*.]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cambodia

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Cambodia.

Mr. Hurd: As one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Britain has played an active role in continuing diplomatic efforts to resolve the Cambodian conflict. In August 1990 the five agreed on a framework for a comprehensive political settlement. This was accepted in its entirety by the Cambodian parties in September when they also agreed to form a Supreme National Council (SNC) which will embody national sovereignty and represent Cambodia at the United Nations. The framework was subsequently endorsed unanimously by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The five's framework was elaborated into a full-scale draft agreement at meetings in Jakarta from 9-10 November and in Paris from 23-26 November. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The document covers the major aspects of a settlement, including the proposed mandate for a UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC); a ceasefire and related military measures; elections; the repatriation of Cambodian refugees and displaced persons; and principles for a new constitution. A draft agreement guaranteeing the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability, neutrality and national unity of Cambodia; and a declaration on Cambodia's rehabilitation and reconstruction were also produced.

Our objective remains a durable settlement which will enable the Cambodian people to choose their own Government free from the fear of Khmer Rouge atrocities, invasion or civil war. We believe that the five's plan offers the best chance of this. It is now up to the Cambodians to play their part, firstly by resolving the differences between them which have so far prevented the Supreme National Council from functioning; and by stopping the fighting. It will then be possible for the French and Indonesian co-chairmen to reconvene the Paris international conference on Cambodia to complete work on the settlement documents and formally adopt them. We hope that will happen soon.

Antarctica

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries proposing a protocol at the Antarctic conference in Chile and those Antarctic treaty consultative parties who support the proposal.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Argentina, Norway, Uruguay, the United Kingdom and the United States had proposed, before the meeting, that a protocol to the Antarctic treaty, together with annexes setting out detailed rules on specific activities, would provide a practical means of protecting the Antarctic environment.

This proposal, together with illustrative draft protocols tabled by the United Kingdom and United States of America, and a draft protocol tabled by New Zealand, together with a proposal for separate convention tabled by France and Australia, were discussed at the meeting. The outcome of these discussions is set out in paragraphs 18-20 of the report of the meeting as follows:

"18. Detailed discussion of the various proposals led to the conclusion that there was unanimous support for the need to adopt a new legally binding international instrument for the protection of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems. Although the proposed texts represented alternative options, there was a considerable measure of agreement as to the general structure of such a legal instrument. A member of one delegation, Mr. Rolf Trolle Andersen from Norway, presented, on a personal basis, a single text drawing upon the documents mentioned in paragraph 9 as well as on draft articles proposed in the Working Group I and sub-groups.

19. The Meeting agreed that this draft Protocol and Annexes should be attached to this Report as Annex F. Reflecting, as it does, the papers submitted and the discussions at the XIth Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting, it would form a valuable basis for further work to be undertaken at a future session of XIth Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting in 1991. It was understood that these texts would not prejudice the position of any government with regard to the issues addressed therein nor any proposals already made.

20. The Meeting noted that the present restraint on Antarctic mineral resource activities continues. In the context of future work on the issue addressed in Article 6 of the attached Protocol, a number of delegations expressed their strong preference for a permanent ban, others continued to see merit in CRAMRA, but there was a widespread willingness to consider a lengthy prohibition or moratorium. Several aspects of this issue, in particular the circumstances and modalities under which a prohibition might be reviewed or terminated needed further consideration. In regard to a moratorium, it was stressed that internationally agreed arrangements for taking decisions on mineral resource activities should be in place before the need for such decisions arises."

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Antarctic treaty negotiations.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The XIth special consultative meeting of the Antarctic treaty parties ended in Chile on 6 December. A copy of the interim report of the meeting is being placed in the Library of the House. When final texts of the annexes to the report are available, they will be added to the report.

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has discussed the problem of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union and east Europe with the Governments of those countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze the problem of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union during his visit to Moscow in September. At the CSCE Paris summit in November, all participant states signed the charter of Paris for a new Europe which contained a statement of determination to combat anti-Semitism.

Arms Control Meeting

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has entered into any correspondence with any individual or organisations on any matter raised during the meeting with non-governmental organisations on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament held at his Department on 23 October.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have written to two non-governmental organisations to amplify points raised during the meeting which the hon. Member refers to. The proceedings were held under Chatham house rules and were thus off the record.

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department plans to produce and distribute any briefing material on the amendment conference of the partial test ban treaty, to be held in New York in January 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The partial test ban treaty amendment conference is addressed in the arms control briefing material published regularly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any research is presently being conducted by his Department towards assisting technical advances in verification of nuclear test locations and magnitudes.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Research into the verification of nuclear testing is the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, which has maintained an active programme in this field for more than 30 years.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current assessment of the attitudes of other states party to the partial test ban treaty towards establishment of a comprehensive nuclear test ban at the conference in New York in January 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We cannot comment on the attitudes of other Governments to the partial test ban treaty amendment conference.

Israel

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Prime Minister or Government of Israel concerning the third anniversary of the intifada on 9 December; what is the latest information available to his Department on the numbers *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured, *(c)* deported, or *(d)* arrested during the intifada; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We estimate that since the outbreak of intifada, 858 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli defence forces, 58 deported and about 10,000 held in administrative detention. Figures for the wounded range from an Israeli estimate of about 13,000 to the Palestine human rights information centre's estimate of about 100,000. These figures speak for themselves and show clearly the urgent need for a settlement to the underlying political dispute. We continue to underline the importance of this in our contacts with the Israeli Government, as well as the need for maximum restraint by the Israeli defence forces.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many people would qualify for the disability working allowance if the requirement to be in receipt of other benefits was removed.

Mr. Scott: The number of people who would qualify for disability working allowance would depend on the disability test adopted.

Income Support

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost in 1991-92 of restoring entitlement to income support to 16 and 17-year-olds at *(a)* the rate for those aged 18 to 24 years, and *(b)* the rate for those aged 25 years or over.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not available to calculate the costs of restoring entitlement to income support to 16 and 17-year-olds.

I regret that the answer which was given by my hon. Friend the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 26 July at column *494* was consequently incorrect. The costs then quoted related not to the costs of changing the basis of entitlement but only to the costs of increasing the rate of income support for 16 and 17-year-olds who would satisfy the current entitlement conditions.

The best estimates that can now be made of the costs of increasing entitlement remain the same as those given earlier, that is, an annual £10 million in relation to the rate of income support of those aged 18 to 24 and an annual £150 million in relation to the rate for those aged 25 or over. More precise estimates are not available because of the unquantifiable interaction between youth training and income support.

I have written to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Jack: In common with other civil service departments and agencies, the Department of Social Security uses the civil service occupational health service (CSOHS) for the provision of occupational health services for its 76,096 full-time and 9,061 part-time employees. The CSOHS employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers—and operates through a network of

regional offices throughout the United Kingdom. The Department employs 18 staff who are also qualified nurses engaged on occupational health including the treatment of sick members of staff and first-aid responsibilities.

Young Persons (Benefits)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to amend the rules regarding those persons aged 16 and 17 years and entitlement to benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no such plans. The Government's policy of guaranteeing a youth training place to all 16 and 17-year-olds who want one removes the need for them to become dependent on benefit.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons aged 16 and 17 years receiving special hardship allowance are *(a)* living independently and *(b)* living in board and lodging.

Miss Widdecombe: Special hardship allowance was replaced by reduced earnings allowance from 1 October 1986. I assume that the question concerns 16 and 17-year-olds receiving severe hardship payments of income support. The information is not available in the form requested. However, in the week ending 30 November 1990 the numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds for whom a direction was made enabling income support to be awarded, under the severe hardship provision, was as follows:

	Number
Living independently	147
In lodging	240

A further 12 directions were made for which the requested information is unavailable.

Taxes and Benefits

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table similar to those used in the tax benefit model showing net weekly spending patterns for *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a couple with two children aged under 11 years with one earner, *(c)* a couple with two children aged under 11 years with two earners, *(d)* a lone parent with one child under 11 years old and *(e)* a lone parent with two children under 11 years in the old tax and benefit system before the 1988 social security changes and in 1990 in the following weekly £10 bands of income from £60 to £170.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is contained in the published tax-benefit model tables for the years in question, copies of which are available in the Library. I regret that it is not possible to provide an answer to *(c)*, since the hon. Member has not stipulated whether income is gross or net; whether it is just earnings and how it is divided between the two earners. This will affect the amount of income tax and national insurance contributions paid and the amount of income-related benefits to which the family is entitled.

Family Credit

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will lose without transitional protection under his proposals in "Children Come First" from the change in the definition of full-time work from 24 hours to 16 hours; and what the cost of transitional protection will be.

Miss Widdecombe: The majority of people receiving income support and working between 16 and 24 hours at the point of change will qualify for family credit and will be better off. We expect that some 25,000 people will be entitled to receive protection at an estimated cost of £25 million in the first year (1990-91 prices), decreasing thereafter.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of days it takes to process a family credit claim for *(a)* all claimants, *(b)* employees and *(c)* the self-employed.

Mr. Jack: For the 12 months ending 30 November 1990 the average was as follows:

	Working days
All claimants	18·45
Employees	17·01
Self-employed	26·90

A fast path arrangement is available to people who have just started work after being on unemployment benefit or income support, and which enables family credit to be put into payment very quickly.

Benefits (Monitoring)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds have been interviewed by his Department's staff under the provisions announced on 13 March 1989, *Official Report*, columns *27-28*.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about the number of 16 and 17-year-olds interviewed by local office staff is not available. However, between 1 April 1989 and 30 November 1990, 39,341 claims were referred after interview to the severe hardship claims unit for consideration of payment under the severe hardship provisions.

Community Care

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make extra funds available for community care grants for his Department's offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many local authority tenants of pensionable age in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole, are in receipt of (i) full housing benefit and (ii) partial housing benefit; and what proportion they are of the total number of local authority tenants of pensionable age in *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that the number of people aged 60 and over in receipt of rent rebates at 31 May 1989 for Scotland was:

	Thousands	Percentage of LA tenants[1]
Claimants in receipt of rent rebate and also in receipt of income support	105,000	(24)
Claimants in receipt of rent rebate and not in receipt of income support	156,000	(35)
Total	261,000	(59)

[1] LA tenants are men aged 65 and over; and women aged 60 and over.

Source:
(a) Housing Benefit Management Information System annual statistical enquiry, and
(b) Department of Employment Labour Force Survey April 1989.

Information concerning the number of housing benefit recipients aged 60 and over in Greenock and Port Glasgow and Strathclyde is not available.

Benefits (Monitoring)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of his Department's staff have been trained to deal with the requirements of 16 and 17-year-olds under the procedures announced on 13 March 1989, *Official Report*, columns *27-28;* what was the training involved; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No records are held of the number of staff who have been trained. All appropriate staff receive technical training in the income support benefit provisions for 16 and 17-year-olds. Specialised training is provided for staff who interview young people under the severe hardship provisions, to enable them to recognise the needs of this vulnerable group.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the state earnings-related pension payable in each year since 1978; and if he will give a projection for each year to 1999 based on earnings rising by 1·5 per cent. above prices each year for *(a)* a full-time worker consistently earning half the average wage, using average gross weekly earnings for all full-time workers on adult rates in all industries and services excluding those whose pay was affected by absence, *(b)* a full-time worker consistently earning the average wage, as above and *(c)* the maximum addition payable.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

The weekly amounts of additional pension payable on retirement on 6th April in the stated year are as follows, for:

Year of Retirement	(a)	(b)	(c)
1978	0·00	0·00	0·00
1979	0·30	0·85	1·30
1980	0·75	1·95	2·90
1981	1·35	3·35	5·25
1982	2·10	5·55	8·45
1983	2·85	7·55	11·70
1984	3·60	9·80	15·10
1985	4·55	12·05	19·10
1986	5·55	14·70	23·25
1987	6·85	18·00	28·50
1988	8·40	21·70	34·00
1989	10·25	26·10	40·45
1990	12·70	31·85	48·65
1991	14·70	36·90	56·00
1992	16·85	42·45	63·65
1993	19·20	48·15	72·05
1994	22·05	54·85	81·35
1995	25·00	62·10	91·40
1996	28·30	70·10	102·35
1997	32·00	78·95	114·30
1998	36·10	88·65	127·35

(a) A person on one-half of average earnings.
(b) A person on average earnings.
(c) A person earning at or above the Upper Earnings Limit.

Notes: From 1990 onwards 5 per cent. prices and 6·5 per cent. earnings growth is assumed.
Average earnings are those for all full-time workers on adult rates in all industries and services, excluding those affected by absence.

Glasgow East End Community Conference

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost to public funds of the Glasgow east end community conference in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have been asked to reply.

The east end management unit has estimated the direct cost to public funds of the Glasgow east end community conference for the years in question to have been as follows:

	£
1988	6,400
1989	12,700
1990	14,825

HEALTH

General Practitioners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on patients being required to change general practitioners because of their failure to agree to have such tests as cervical smears.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There have been a number of allegations, but no hard evidence to suggest that patients are being forced to change GP for such reasons. Such behaviour would be highly unprofessional.

Nuclear Industry Workers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a study of the incidence of retinoblastoma in the offspring of nuclear industry workers.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department and the Health and Safety Executive are finalising the contractual arrangements for detailed epidemiological studies into the health of offspring of individuals who are occupationally exposed to radiation. These studies will include data on the incidence of all cancers in the offspring of radiation workers where relevant.

Sexual Behaviour

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to establish a national survey of sexual behaviour.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Stationery

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council what quantity of office and correspondence paper is used annually by hon. Members and staff in the House; and how much it costs.

Mr. MacGregor: The approximate total cost of stationery items supplied to the House by HMSO during the year from 1 october 1989 to 31 September 1990 was £333,000. The individual quantities of each of these items could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Information Technology

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to make the *Official Report* and other parliamentary documents available to hon. Members and the public on compact disc.

Mr. MacGregor: HMSO and Chadwyck-Healey Limited plan to launch the *Official Report* on compact disc (CD-ROM) during 1991. This is a joint venture and the discs will be made available commercially, although the pricing structure has yet to be finalised. The intention is to include initially at least the previous Session plus the current Session, with cumulatively updated discs being issued following each recess. Users with an IBM-compatible personal computer equipped with a CD-ROM drive will be able rapidly to search and access the text by keying in a significant word or combination of words.

A separate joint venture involving HMSO and Context Limited should also see the appearance in 1991 of statutory instruments on CD-ROM.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 19 November, *Official Report*, column *24*, he will set out details of the specific energy conservation projects, better housekeeping and energy-conscious design of facilities in the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I will write to the hon. Member.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of pay and allowances, and the standard of equipment, including clothing, provided to British troops in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has already made it clear that no member of the armed forces will suffer financially as a result of being posted to the Gulf. Sufficient desert pattern combat clothing has been delivered to meet the needs of the personnel in theatre. More is on order for the additional troops that will deploy with 4 Brigade and 1 Armoured Division. Equipment provided to British troops in the Gulf has been trialled and tested extensively, much of it in hot, dry climates. The equipment in the Gulf is performing well.

Contracts

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of defence contracts in the calendar year 1989 was awarded directly to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret that this information is not readily available at the present time.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to reduce the numbers of Ministry of Defence police based at Brizlee Wood, Northumberland; and if he has anything to add to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column *234*.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) to the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 3 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *51*. Brizlee Wood is one of the sites concerned.

United States Nuclear Laboratories

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, South of 21 November, *Official Report*, column *135*, he will set out *(a)* the number of officials who have visited, respectively, Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore and Sandia research laboratories, *(b)* the purpose for each visit, *(c)* the cost of each visit, *(d)* the dates of each visit and *(e)* the benefits of the visits to which he made reference.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the policy of successive British Governments not to disclose such detailed information on visits made under the terms of the 1958 US-UK agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes.

Dartmouth Naval College

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Dartmouth naval college; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following my right hon. Friend's statement on 25 July on "Options for Change", the future of the whole of the naval estate and support services is under consideration. Any announcements of changes will be made at the appropriate time.

Iraq

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current assessment of Iraq's capability of constructing a nuclear explosive device.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We assess that Iraq is not currently capable of constructing a nuclear explosive device.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any visits to the atomic weapons establishments at *(a)* Aldermaston, *(b)* Burghfield and *(c)* Llanishen by scientific experts from (i) the United States and (ii) the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the current year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the current year United States officials have visited all three of these establishments under the terms of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes. There have been no visits by Soviet officials.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funds were allocated to the atomic weapons establishment in 1990; and what will be the level of funding in 1991.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our practice to disclose information of this kind on funding of the nuclear programme.

SCOTLAND

Cleveland Fuels (Pollution)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the chairman of Clydeside against Pollution opposing Cleveland Fuels proposals to install an incinerator at Clyde street, Renfrew; and what reply he has sent.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A letter from the group Clydeside against Pollution was received on 4 December 1990 and was acknowledged by Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate on 7 December 1990. In that it makes further representation about the application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for registration of an incinerator works in Renfrew under section 9(1) of the Alkali etc. Works Regulation Act 1906, Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate will take account of its contents during their consideration of the application.

Govan Initiative

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Govan Initiative has used public funds to purchase or lease the premises at 6 Harmony Row, Govan.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No.

University Students

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned on the reasons for the reduction in numbers of students in the Scottish universities since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There was no reduction in the numbers of students in Scottish universities between 1979-80 and 1988-89. The number of full-time undergraduate students at Scottish universities rose over the period from 38,570 to 42,870, an increase of more than 10 per cent.

Council Houses

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses he expects will be completed during 1990-91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In their housing plan checklists which were submitted to the Scottish Development Department in November, local authorities estimate that they will complete approximately 1,181 houses in the financial year 1990-91.

Homelessness

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are classed as homeless in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Over the 12 months to 31 March 1990, the numbers of households which applied under the homeless persons legislation and were assessed by local authorities as homeless, as recorded in the returns submitted to the Scottish Development Department, were as follows:

	Number
Inverclyde district	142
Strathclyde region[1]	4,812
Scotland[1]	10,962

[1] provisional.

Residential Homes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if police forces give information to directors of social work departments on any criminal records of persons who apply for registration of ownership of homes which care for persons who are severely mentally handicapped; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. Information of this kind is provided by the Scottish criminal records office on request to designated senior officers in social work departments.

Local Government Finance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many suggestions he has received concerning alternatives to the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend regularly receives correspondence proposing improvements to the community charge and possible alternatives to it. These views will be taken into account during the Government's review of the community charge.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many merchant seamen have been granted exemption from poll tax obligations by way of decisions taken by *(a)* community charge registration officers and *(b)* sheriffs upon appeals made by merchant seamen against decisions made by community charge registration officers.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information on decisions as to where individuals are solely or mainly resident is not held centrally.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the progress of his latest review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government have made it clear that the review is to be conducted on a Great Britain basis and will involve the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will of course, be paying particular attention to Scottish aspects of the review.

Forestry Grants

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Government have any plans to review the rates of grant for forestry planting.

Mr. Lang: The Government considered the rates of grant for broadleaved planting as part of their recent review of broadleaves policy, the outcome of which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in reply to a question from my hon. Friend on 23 July, *Official Report*, columns *6-11*.

We concluded that against the background of the considerable expansion in broadleaved planting that had taken place since we introduced our new broadleaves policy in 1985, and given the substantial rise in grant rates which accompanied the introduction of the woodland grant scheme in 1988, there was no evidence that the planting grants on offer were inadequate. At the same time, however, we were able to announce that woodland management grants would be introduced under the woodland grant scheme for both broadleaved and conifer woodlands from 1 April 1992, with enhanced rates of grant for woodlands of special environmental value. This move has been widely welcomed.

We have also received the rates of grant for conifer planting and, as with broadleaves, we have concluded that there is no convincing case at present for general increases under the Forestry Commission's grant schemes. There has been a drop in conifer planting, but it is our view that this has been due not to any inadequacy in grant rates as such but to a combination of factors, including the price and availability of suitable land and the general economic situation.

Nevertheless, it remains an important part of our forestry policy that a higher proportion of planting should take place on low ground of better quality than hitherto. We have therefore decided to increase the better land supplement of £200 per hectare, which is available as a top-up grant under the woodland grant scheme for planting on arable land or grassland which has been cultivated and improved within the previous ten years. The new rates will be £400 per hectare for conifer planting and £600 per hectare for planting with broadleaves, and will apply to any eligible planting done under the scheme on or after 1 October 1990. The supplement is not available under the farm woodland scheme, for which special annual payments are made by the agriculture departments.

The cost of the higher supplements will be in the region of £1 million per annum; this will be met from within existing resources.

I am sure that these increases in the better land supplement will lead to considerably more planting on better land "down the hill" and that they will be welcomed by landowning and environmental interests alike.

Higher Education

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the adult population is now in higher education; what was the figure in 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The number of adults in full-time higher education in Scotland in 1988-89, expressed as a percentage of the Scottish population aged 21 to 34 was 3·5 per cent. The equivalent figure for 1985-86 was 3 per cent. Information on the numbers of adults in higher education in years before 1985-86 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The provisional figure for the proportion of young Scots entering higher education in 1989-90 has risen to over 24 per cent. compared with 21 per cent. in 1988-89.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Scottish Office purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. Information on the Scottish Office total purchasing expenditure, from 1986-87, is, however, reproduced in the annual report of the Treasury's central unit on purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

9. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have been prosecuted for non-payment of the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department does not have this information, but I understand that most authorities in England have now started their enforcement procedures.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, *Official Report*, 26 November, column *259*, he will give further information for those local authorities for which information is missing in the material deposited in the Library.

Mr. Key: Five local authorities have sent in returns to my Department since the previous answer I gave to the hon. Member.

	Authority				
	Birmingham	*Purbeck*	*Three Rivers*	*Warwick*	*York*
Number of people who have made a payment in respect of a personal community charge by 30 September 1990	474,409	32,379	53,554	89,750	64,949
Number of people liable who have not made a payment in respect of a personal community charge by 30 September 1990	187,704	1,309	6,360	11,750	11,594
Proportion of charge payers making a payment Per cent.	71·7	96·1	89·4	88·4	84·9

36. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the projected shortfall in collection of the poll tax in Liverpool for the current financial year.

Mr. Key: The Department does not have this information, but I understand that in the current financial year Liverpool has budgeted for £7,500,000 for community charge debts.

28. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the personal community charges set in the current year in the boroughs of Gravesham and Thurrock.

Mr. Key: The figures are as follows: Gravesham £294; Thurrock £417.

29. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to transfer the educational component of local authority spending to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have announced that we shall be undertaking a fundamental review of local government finance and structure.

21. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for changes to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

24. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received seeking the repeal of the community charge.

26. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about his policy on a review of the poll tax.

30. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on further proposals he is now considering for reform of the community charge.

34. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a fundamental review of the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today.

Home Improvement Grants

17. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has had any discussions with the local authorities associations about the operation of the home improvement grant system.

Mr. Yeo: Officials from my Department have done so regularly, most recently on 30 November.

National Rivers Authority

19. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of prosecutions undertaken by the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand that the National Rivers Authority brought 3,997 successful prosecutions for all types of offences during its first year of operation. Of these, 3,549 were for fisheries offences, 370 for water pollution offences, 59 for navigational offences and 19 for water resources offences. I shall be reviewing progress with Lord Crickhowell in the near future.

I attach great importance to securing improvements in environmental standards wherever they are needed. We have established an environmental and economic framework within which decisions will be taken.

Council Housing

20. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional council houses he anticipates being completed during 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are expecting to complete about 13,000 houses during 1990-91. The Government see housing associations as the main providers of additional subsidised housing for rent. Public funding for associations through the Housing Corporation will increase from £1·1 billion this year to over £2 billion by 1993-94. Together with their increased ability to draw in private funds, this will permit a sustained increase in output of subsidised housing by associations over the next few years.

Homelessness

22. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many children are currently housed by local authorities in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Sir George Young: This information is not available centrally.

25. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of people who will be homeless this Christmas.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that was given by my hon. Friend the then Minister of Housing and Planning on Tuesday 27 November 1990 to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth).

Housing Associations

23. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with tenants of housing associations in London on the subject of home ownership.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend receives representations on this subject from a variety of sources, including housing association tenants and their representatives.

Buy British Policy

27. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has a buy British policy.

Mr. Heseltine: We seek to achieve value for money and to honour our international obligations.

Nature Conservancy Council

31. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council to discuss reorganisation.

Mr. Trippier: Ministers from my Department have met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council on a number of occasions during the last 18 months at which the Government's proposals to reorganise the Nature Conservancy Council were discussed.

Methane Gas

32. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps can be taken to reduce or eliminate any hazard resulting from the escape of methane gas from domestic rubbish dumps.

Mr. Trippier: A number of technical solutions are available to reduce or eliminate the hazard resulting from the escape of landfill gas, which contains methane, from landfill sites containing domestic waste. Guidance on these measures is given in the Department's waste management paper No. 27—"Control of Landfill Gas".

Water Charges

33. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to require water companies to charge for their services by means of *(a)* a flat-rate charge per property or *(b)* a water poll tax.

Mr. Trippier: No. Methods of charging for their services are for individual water companies to determine.

Housing Action Trusts

35. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing action trusts have been established.

Mr. Yeo: No housing action trusts have so far been established. However, discussions are proceeding with the council and tenants in the London borough of Waltham Forest, and Hull city council is consulting tenants about the proposal for a housing action trust for the North Hull estate.

Rented Housing

37. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to build houses for rent at reasonable prices for those people who cannot afford to buy houses.

Sir George Young: The Government see housing associations as the main providers of additional subsidised housing where it is needed. Public funding for the Housing Corporation will increase from £1·1 billion this year to over £2 billion by 1993-94. Together with their increased ability to draw in private funds, this will permit a sustained increase in output of low-cost housing by associations over the next few years.

Victoria Tower

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ealing, North, 30 November, *Official Report*, column *500*, if he will indicate the depth beneath ground level of the support structures for the scaffolding recently erected on the Victoria Tower; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The answer is 21 m.

Catalytic Reduction Technology

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent assessment he has made of the potential environmental benefits of selective catalytic reduction technology in respect of large combustion plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has recently received a report on NOx abatement technologies which includes an assessment of the performance of selective catalytic reduction technology. The report is currently being considered.

Birds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all changes to the protection or quarry status of bird species in the United Kingdom since the enactment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mr. Baldry: There have been no changes to the status of any bird species since the Act came into force.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether capercaillie and black grouse are still quarry species in the United Kingdom; and if he has any plans to alter their status.

Mr. Baldry: Both capercaillie and black grouse may be hunted in the open season. There are no plans at present to alter these arrangements.

Bathing Waters

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set maximum limits for the presence of salmonella and enterovirus in bathing waters;

(2) what plans he has to ensure compliance with the salmonella and enterovirus standards in the EC bathing water directive.

Mr. Baldry: The EC bathing water directive sets limits for salmonella and enteroviruses. The limits are zero salmonella in 1 litre and zero enteroviruses in 10 litres in 95 per cent. of bathing water samples. It is widely accepted that these standards are deficient and have no regard to risks to public health: the Environment Select Committee has recently endorsed this view. The European Commission has brought forward proposals for a committee of adaptation to review the bathing water directive. One of its remits would be to look at those standards. This Government have supported the need for such a review. Pending adoption of revised standards we shall continue to monitor and report in accordance with the directive, but our assessment of compliance will be based on its coliform standards.

Community Forests

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made towards the establishment of community forests on the outskirts of towns and cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Project teams have been set up in east London, south Staffordshire and Tyne and Wear to prepare business plans for the forests launched in those areas. In addition the Countryside Commission is considering proposals for forests at various other locations.

RECHAR

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the rules governing local authority finance in those areas which militate against local authorities being able to fully take up grants under European Community programmes, in particular the RECHAR scheme.

Mr. Yeo: In setting annually the level of public expenditure programmes for local authorities, account is taken of anticipated European Community receipts so that these programmes are larger than they would otherwise be. However, in addition for 1990-91 the other services block was "top sliced" by £25 million for distribution as supplementary credit approvals to local authorities in receipt of European regional development fund. In the light of representations received from local authorities it is proposed to increase the top slice to £45 million for this purpose in 1991-92.

Emissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy with regard to the application to large combustion plants by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution of the BATNEEC provisions in the Environment Protection Act where these provisions require stricter standards than those in the national emission reduction plan.

Mr. Baldry: Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution must, among other things, ensure the use of BATNEEC and compliance with any plan made by the Secretary of State. Where one of these requirements is more onerous than the other, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution must include conditions in authorisations which achieve the more onerous standards.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to exempt the electricity generation industry from the new BATNEEC guidance notes being issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Public Paths

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Hampshire on his policy regarding the reclassification of public paths; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have received a number of representations both from local councils and individuals. While I appreciate the concern expressed about the possible effects of reclassifying roads used as public paths (RUPPs) as byways open to all traffic (BOATs), the regulation of use by vehicles, were necessary, is a separate management issue. There are already appropriate powers available to highway authorities. However, the rights of way review committee is presently considering a number of issues relating to the use of vehicles in the countryside, and I look forward to hearing its views.

Fire Advisory Panel

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to ensure that the advice he receives from his fire advisory panel is completely impartial.

Mr. Yeo: The fire advisory panel has been established to provide a forum for the discussion of technical issues related to fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations 1985. The panel draws its membership from across the whole field of fire safety in buildings, and from both the public and private sectors, and this wide spectrum of professional expertise safeguards the impartiality of the panel's advice. A further safeguard is provided by the need for proposals from the panel for changes to the regulations to be considered by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, which has the statutory responsibility of advising the Secretary of State on them.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to revise the membership of his fire advisory panel.

Mr. Yeo: Membership of the fire advisory panel is kept under regular review. A technical expert from the Loss Prevention Council has recently been invited to join the panel.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he takes to ensure that the membership of his fire advisory panel is fully representative of all aspects of the fire safety limits.

Mr. Yeo: Membership of the fire advisory panel includes representatives from the Home Office, the Scottish Development Department, and the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) as well as of my Department. Non-governmental members include fire safety consultants, architects, building control officers, representatives of the fire service, and technical experts from universities, fire testing organisations, the building

materials industry, and the fire insurance industry. The secretariat is provided by the fire research station. The panel therefore already has available a wide range of experience and expertise, but whenever gaps are identified, steps are taken to fill them.

Landfill Gas

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on contracts recently placed by his Department to prepare guidelines for the safety and environmental management of landfill gas recovery.

Mr. Baldry: Such a contract was let in June 1990. It is jointly funded by the Department of the Environment, the Department of Energy, via the Energy Technology Support Unit, and the Office of Gas Supply. It should be completed by next summer.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to which international treaties and conventions which cover the impairment of the environment caused by the spillage, leakage or discharge of radioactive substances is the United Kingdom a party.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom is party to many international treaties and conventions concerned with the discharge of radioactive substances to the environment. In particular, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the European Communities conventions on early notification of a nuclear accident require that signatories should inform the relevant international organisation whenever there is an accident from which an international transboundary release is likely to occur that could be of radiological significance for another state.

Litter

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has made an order under section 90(3) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to describe land as litter control areas for the purposes of designation by local authorities;

(2) if he will list those organisations he intends to consult about the implementation of section 90(3) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Baldry: No order has yet been made under section 90 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We do, however, intend to consult on a draft order in the near future and are currently finalising the list of those to be consulted. I will ensure that the hon. Member is sent a copy. If he wishes to suggest the names of bodies which should be consulted, I invite him to pass them on to my office.

Beach Pollution

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government response to the Environment Select Committee report on pollution of beaches will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Government response is being published today and a copy has been placed in the Library. We welcome the report as pollution of beaches is a matter of great public concern and is something that we are taking active steps to combat.

The Government are committed to improving the quality of bathing waters. In 1990 77 per cent. of our 446 identified bathing waters met European standards compared with only 51 per cent. in 1986. A major investment in the sewerage system around our coasts of £1·4 billion was announced last year to bring all our bathing waters up to European standards.

The Select Committee report coincided with a major Government review of their policies on disposal of sewage to sea. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in March that the discharge of raw sewage from coastal towns is to be banned. Over £2 billion is to be spent on additional treatment and £600 million of this will be spent on bathing waters over the next five years.

The Select Committee has also focused on the relationship between risks to health and sea bathing and concluded that the risk of contracting serious disease is minimal. The Government accept that more research is necessary into the risks of contracting minor infections and, with the National Rivers Authority, will fund a continuation of the existing programme.

We also believe that the public should be better informed about bathing water quality. I announced an initiative earlier this year for a voluntary scheme for local authorities to publicise, at the beach or at other prominent sites, up-to-date information on bathing water quality which will be provided by the National Rivers Authority. The local authority associations in England and Wales have endorsed the idea and we are pressing ahead finalising the arrangements for the scheme to be ready for the start of next year's bathing season. A poster is being developed for local display which will give easily understood information on bathing water quality as part of our policy on improved access to environmental information.

Goods and Services

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish tables showing the amount spent on *(a)* acquiring and *(b)* commissioning goods and services by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Departmental purchasing information systems do not differentiate between acquiring and commissioning goods and services. However, information on departmental purchasing expenditure from 1986-87 is set out in the annual reports of the central unit on purchasing, copies of which are available in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The information in respect of paid publicity and associated staff costs for my Department, including PSA, is as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	3·5
1986-87	4·2
1987-88	4·8
1988-89	6·9
1989-90	31·5

Expenditure is not broken down between different publicity media.

The increase in expenditure in 1989-90 arises mainly from the flotation of the 10 water plcs, and from specific information campaigns on new legislation on local government finance and housing and to encourage the use of lead-free petrol.

Council Houses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the London borough of Ealing, in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Tables giving available information on each local authority's sales for each financial year up to June 1990 were laid in the Library on 29 November. The equivalent figures for England are as follows:

Local authority sales and transfers England: (thousands)

	Sales to owner occupiers	*Other transfers*[1]	*Total sales and transfers*
1979-80	54	—	54
1980-81	68	—	68
1981-82	128	—	128
1982-83	181	—	181
1983-84	119	3	122
1984-85	91	—	91
1985-86	82	—	82
1986-87	85	1	86
1987-88	103	10	113
1988-89	145	12	156
1989-90	134	14	148
[2]1990-91	27	11	38

[1] To housing associations and private developers.
[2] 1st quarter only.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the cost in income support plus the £10 bonus of payments to employment training trainees in 1988-89 and 1989-90; and what was the average weekly income support and the £10 bonus during each of those two years.

Mr. Jackson: Employment training was launched in September 1988. Expenditure on employment training trainee allowances was £151·7 million in 1988-89, and £527·4 million in 1989-90.

The average allowance per trainee on employment training was approximately £48 per week in 1988-89 and £50 per week in 1989-90.

Youth Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of those persons aged 16 and 17 years who are not undertaking a YTS placement.

Mr. Jackson: The latest, mid-1989, estimated total population figure of persons aged 16 and 17 years in Great Britain is 1,552,266. The number of persons in those age groups undertaking a YTS placement in July 1989 was 408,900.

Tourism

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) in what manner his Department intends to input the tourist industry's view into the ongoing review of the poll tax;

(2) what recent representations he has received from the tourist industry on the 100-day rule and bed-and-breakfast accommodation;

(3) what plans there are for amending the 100-day rule within the British tourist industry.

Mr. Forth: Through their frequent contacts, Ministers and officials in the Department ensure that their counterparts at the Department of the Environment (DOE) are kept fully informed of the views of the tourism industry about the community charge and the uniform business rate. This will also apply to the planned comprehensive review of local government finance.

The Department has received many representations, both directly and via the tourist boards, about bed-and-breakfast accommodation and the uniform business rate, all of which have been critical of the "100-day rule". We therefore welcome the DOE's plans to draw up alternative regulations, drawing on the responses to its extensive consultation exercise.

Ports (Accidents)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the fatal accident statistics and serious injury statistics for each employee for the years 1984 onwards for the port of London and each of the Medway ports.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tenosynovitis

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what research has been conducted by his Department into means of preventing tenosynovitis; and in which industries workers suffer from tenosynovitis;

(2) how many actions for damage to health by tenosynovitis have been initiated in each of the last five years;

(3) what is his estimate of the number of people who suffer from arm or wrist damage from the repetitive work syndrome called tenosynovitis.

Mr. Forth: Tenosynovitis is one of a number of musculo-skeletal disorders affecting the hand and arm which can be brought on by working conditions,

particularly by repetitive grasping and twisting performed under time pressures. These upper limb disorders can occur throughout industry and are not specific to particular sectors.

The Health and Safety Executive has recently published a booklet, "Work related upper limb disorders: a guide to prevention", drawing on the following research which it has funded:

"Clinical epidemiological study of relations between upper limb soft tissue disorders and repetitive movements at work". Institute of Occupational Medicine, Edinburgh. Research Report TM/88/19;

"Development of an aid to identifying task elements which may predispose individuals to work related upper limb disorders". Institute of Occupational Medicine, Edinburgh. Research Report TM/90/08;

"Occurrence and mechanism of occupational repetition strain injuries". University of Birmingham. ISBN 070441094X

There are no reliable estimates of the number of workers affected by tenosynovitis. But the first study listed found a 4·8 per cent. incidence of tenosynovitis (21 cases) from a sample of 437 individuals presenting to orthopaedic clinics with upper limb disorders and who had worked during the previous two years.

I regret that information on actions for damage to health by tenosynovitis is not available.

Employment Agencies Act

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of refusals or revocations of licenses granted under the provisions of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 have been on account of *(a)* a criminal conviction, *(b)* civil proceedings against the applicant and *(c)* other grounds of unsuitability.

Mr. Jackson: Of the 55 refusals or revocations of licences *(a)* 25 were on grounds of criminal convictions *(b)* one on grounds of civil proceedings and *(c)* 29 on other grounds of unsuitability.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many appeals against refusals or revocations of licences under section 4 of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 have been lodged with him since 1973; and with what result.

Mr. Jackson: Since 1976, when the Act came into force, there have been 36 appeals of which eight were successful.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the actual grounds on which any licences have been refused or revoked under the provisions of the Employment Agencies Act 1973.

Mr. Jackson: The grounds on which licences have been refused or revoked are: convictions for criminal offences, lack of financial probity, civil debt, failure to conduct an employment agency or an employment business properly and unsuitability of the relevant premises.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on how many occasions in the last 10 years licences granted under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 have been *(a)* refused or *(b)* revoked under the provisions of section 3 of that Act.

Mr. Jackson: In the last 10 years, 33 licences have been refused and five licences have been revoked.

Crown Premises

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to replace the system of Crown notices to cover health and safety at work at Crown premises with a regime that incorporates all Crown premises under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988.

Mr. Forth: Generally the Crown is required to comply with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and the relevant statutory provisions, which include the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988. However, the Crown is immune from prosecution, and therefore the arrangements for enforcement are carried out through an alternative system of Crown notices. There are no plans to introduce legislation to change this position.

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with organisations representing disabled people regarding the introduction of rehabilitation leave to encourage employers to retain workers who become disabled.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The Royal National Institute for the Blind told my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State of a proposal that they are developing for rehabilitation leave. His response was that we should like to see employers taking more positive action on addressing the needs of any people who become disabled while in employment and that the employment service can help employers to do this.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 December 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all those whom the registrar of criminal appeals consulted in determining the judges who are to cover the appeal of the six persons convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The Attorney-General: The allocation of judges to the Court of Appeal criminal division is the responsibility of the Lord Chief Justice. The Lord Chancellor understands that the registrar of criminal appeals consulted the Lord Chief Justice in determining the constitution of the court which will hear the appeals of the six persons convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings.

Law Commissioners

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Government have any proposals to amend the qualification required by a candidate for appointment as a law commissioner in England and Wales.

The Attorney-General: At present, the law governing the appointment of law commissioners in England and Wales requires them to be persons appearing to the Lord Chancellor to be suitably qualified by the holding of the judicial office, or by experience as a barrister or solicitor, or as a teacher of law in a university. The Lord Chancellor now proposes to extend this latter qualification to include teachers of law at institutions other than universities. He intends to make the necessary amendment to the Law Commissions Act 1965 when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

TRANSPORT

Severn Bridge

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the pattern of debt to the Consolidated Fund in relation to the Severn bridge to assume a downward trend.

Mr. Freeman: If tolls were to continue to be levied under the provisions of the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965 the debt should start to reduce during the financial year 1992-93. But under the Severn Bridges Bill, introduced to the House on 27 November 1990, it is proposed to introduce a new financial regime for the present and the new bridge.

Radio-navigation Systems

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in recent discussions with other European nations regarding the introduction of the proposed north-west European Loran C system of radio-navigation; and if he will make a statement on the up-to-date position.

Mr. McLoughlin: The international discussions are still proceeding. No firm agreement has yet been reached.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the report of the inquiry by the marine accident investigation bureau into the sinking of the Antares; if the report will be made public; and if he will arrange to make a statement on its publication of what action he proposes to take.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation branch investigation into the sinking of the Antares has been given the status of an inspector's inquiry under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations. The inquiry involves a very detailed investigation into the circumstances of the accident; and this necessarily takes time to complete. An interim report is expected very shortly. This will assist the Secretary of State in deciding what action needs to be taken. I expect the full report of the chief inspector to be published.

Jubilee Line (Extension)

Mr. Orme: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the latest position on London Underground's plans for the Jubilee line extension at Westminster.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to be able to tell the House that London Underground has now produced a revised design for Westminster station which it believes would better meet the concerns expressed by the House Services Committee. In particular, its new proposal would enable it wholly to avoid using Parliament square as a work site, to reduce the impact upon traffic in the roads surrounding Parliament and to avoid elevated decking in Bridge street. London Underground will shortly be setting out these proposals in a report to the New Buildings Sub-Committee.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the gross domestic product per capita in £ sterling in each of the member nations of the Council of Europe and the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Maples: Estimates of gross domestic product per capita for a number of countries are shown in table 1 of "National Accounts Statistics: Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables, 1987" issued by the United Nations earlier this year. Data are also given in the "World Bank Atlas, 1988". Both publications are available in the Library of the House. For the Warsaw pact economies, the information on economic activity is prepared in accordance with the United Nations system of material product balances which differs from the United Nations system of national accounts used to describe Council of Europe economies.

General Government Expenditure

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing, for the latest years now available, identifiable general Government expenditure by function in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of United Kingdom total identifiable general Government expenditure, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as an index, United Kingdom identifiable general Government expenditure = 100.

Mr. Mellor: Most public expenditure is planned on a national basis and there is no geographical disaggregation apart from expenditure which is the responsibility of the territorial Departments. However, in order to provide a more comprehensive breakdown of public expenditure within the four countries of the United Kingdom an additional analysis, covering outturn years, is carried out each year. This analysis allocates, where possible, general Government expenditure to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland and, therefore, includes within the territories a wider coverage of expenditure than that for which the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland are directly responsible.

The analysis divides spending into "identifiable" and "non-identifiable" expenditure. The term "identifiable expenditure" refers to expenditure that can be identified from official records as having been incurred for the benefit of people in a particular country. The coverage of identifiable expenditure has been changed since last year's exercise to produce a greater consistency of treatment between different types of expenditure. In the following analyses of territorial spending all expenditure on common services—for example, revenue and tax collection, financial administration—has been treated as unidentifiable. In previous years this category of expenditure was not treated in a consistent manner. This change reduces identifiable expenditure by around £3 billion—2 per cent. —but does not appreciably affect the index of per capita expenditure between territories. Unidentifiable expenditure mainly consists of expenditure deemed to have been incurred on behalf of the United Kingdom as a whole, for example, defence, overseas aid and other overseas services and common services. It also covers expenditure which cannot readily be divided between territories from existing departmental records.

Tables 1 to 5 show figures for identifiable general Government expenditure according to main function in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the years 1985-86 to 1989-90. The tables show identifiable general Government expenditure in each territory in total and on a per capita basis. The per capita figures are based on mid-year population estimates. Figures for earlier years are not available on a totally consistent basis with those given in these tables.

Table 6 compares expenditure by function in the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland programmes in 1989-90 with the total identifiable expenditure in the respective countries. It shows that identifiable expenditure has a wider coverage than expenditure within the responsibilities of the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales; in the case of Northern Ireland it has a slightly wider coverage than the Northern Ireland programme. The table also shows, for 1989-90, unidentifiable expenditure where this can be allocated to function.

In some cases, expenditure which cannot be separately identified for England, Scotland or Wales can be allocated to Great Britain rather than to the United Kingdom; for example, the majority of the finance provided for expenditure by the nationalised industries can be allocated to Great Britain. Tables 7a and 7b compare Northern Ireland allocated expenditure with that allocated to Great Britain over the five-year period.

The extent to which expenditure can be identified may vary from year to year and between countries The coverage of particular functions can also vary between countries; for example, in Northern Ireland, expenditure on arts and libraries is contained in the education category.

The terms and definitions used for this analysis are the same as those used for the recent autumn statement—Cm. 1311—but the figures are based on less up-to-date outturn information.

Table 1a
Identifiable general government expenditure 1985-86

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	618·8	225·4	109·8	148·5	1,102·5	56·1	20·4	10·0	13·5
Trade, industry, energy and employment	3,509·2	664·5	340·3	375·4	4,889·4	71·8	13·6	7·0	7·7
Roads and transport	3,448·7	539·5	268·4	101·3	4,357·9	79·1	12·4	6·2	2·3
Housing	3,099·1	624·0	135·3	345·5	4,203·9	73·7	14·8	3·2	8·2
Other environmental services	3,662·1	501·2	282·4	196·7	4,642·4	78·9	10·8	6·1	4·2
Law, order and protective services	4,192·1	519·9	228·2	473·6	5,413·8	77·4	9·6	4·2	8·7
Education and science	13,562·9	2,052·6	838·2	636·0	17,089·7	79·4	12·0	4·9	3·7
Arts and Libraries	581·8	69·9	31·6	0·0	683·3	85·1	10·2	4·6	0·0
Health and personal social services	16,604·8	2,314·8	1,051·0	697·8	20,668·4	80·3	11·2	5·1	3·4
Social Security	35,311·3	4,072·6	2,245·7	1,310·0	42,939·6	82·2	9·5	5·2	3·1
Miscellaneous[1]	−33·8	97·3	34·5	33·3	131·3	−25·7	74·1	26·3	25·4
TOTAL	84,557·0	11,681·7	5,565·4	4,318·1	106,122·2	79·7	11·0	5·2	4·1

Table 1b
Identifiable general government expenditure per head 1985-86

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	13·1	43·9	39·0	95·3	19·5	67·5	225·4	200·5	489·5
Trade, industry, energy and employment	74·5	129·4	121·0	241·0	86·4	86·3	149·8	140·1	279·0
Roads and transport	73·2	105·0	95·5	65·0	77·0	95·1	136·5	124·0	84·5
Housing	65·8	121·5	48·1	221·8	74·3	88·6	163·6	64·8	298·7
Other environmental services	77·7	97·6	100·4	126·3	82·0	94·8	119·0	122·5	154·0
Law, order and protective services	89·0	101·2	81·2	304·0	95·6	93·1	105·9	84·9	317·9
Education and science	287·9	399·6	298·1	408·3	301·8	95·4	132·4	98·9	135·3
Arts and Libraries	12·3	13·6	11·2	0·0	12·1	102·3	112·8	93·1	0·0
Health and personal social services	352·5	450·7	373·8	447·9	365·1	96·5	123·5	102·4	122·7
Social Security	749·5	792·9	798·7	840·9	758·4	98·8	104·5	105·3	110·9
Miscellaneous[1]	−0·7	18·9	12·3	21·4	2·3	−30·9	816·8	529·1	921·8
TOTAL	1,794·8	2,274·3	1,979·3	2,771·9	1,874·4	95·8	121·3	105·6	147·9

[1] Expenditure includes net receipts of Land Registry in England and Wales and costs from the central administration of the offices of the Secretaries of State.

Table 2a
Identifiable general government expenditure 1986-87

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	590·2	202·7	120·9	153·7	1,067·5	55·3	19·0	11·3	14·4
Trade, industry, energy and employment	3,911·4	811·1	404·2	387·7	5,514·4	70·9	14·7	7·3	7·0
Roads and transport	3,599·1	575·5	292·7	105·0	4,572·3	78·7	12·6	6·4	2·3
Housing	2,956·2	631·2	177·8	334·7	4,099·9	72·1	15·4	4·3	8·2
Other environmental services	3,841·6	546·9	318·5	209·8	4,916·8	78·1	11·1	6·5	4·3
Law, order and protective services	4,592·2	571·2	247·4	521·3	5,932·1	77·4	9·6	4·2	8·8
Education and science	14,838·6	2,198·4	924·6	729·0	18,690·6	79·4	11·8	4·9	3·9
Arts and Libraries	619·1	72·1	33·6	0·0	724·8	85·4	9·9	4·6	0·0
Health and personal social services	17,878·6	2,444·1	1,131·4	748·8	22,202·9	80·5	11·0	5·1	3·4
Social Security	37,965·2	4,355·6	2,442·8	1,423·2	46,168·8	82·2	9·4	5·3	3·1
Miscellaneous[1]	−47·7	103·5	36·7	39·7	132·2	−36·1	78·3	27·8	30·0
TOTAL	90,744·5	12,512·3	6,130·6	4,652·9	114,040·3	79·6	11·0	5·4	4·1

Table 2b
Identifiable general government expenditure per head 1986-87

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	12·5	39·6	42·9	98·7	18·8	66·4	210·5	227·9	525·0
Trade, industry, energy and employment	82·8	158·4	143·3	249·0	97·1	85·2	163·0	147·5	256·3
Roads and transport	76·2	112·4	103·8	67·4	80·6	94·6	139·5	128·8	83·7
Housing	62·6	123·3	63·0	215·0	72·2	86·6	170·7	87·3	297·7
Other environmental services	81·3	106·8	112·9	134·8	86·6	93·9	123·3	130·3	155·6
Law, order and protective services	97·2	111·5	87·7	334·9	104·5	93·0	106·7	83·9	320·4
Education and science	314·0	429·3	327·8	468·3	329·3	95·4	130·4	99·5	142·2
Arts and Libraries	13·1	14·1	11·9	0·0	12·8	102·6	110·3	93·3	0·0
Health and personal social services	378·3	477·3	401·1	481·0	391·1	96·7	122·0	102·5	123·0
Social Security	803·4	850·5	865·9	914·2	813·7	98·7	104·5	106·4	112·4
Miscellaneous[1]	−1·0	20·2	13·0	25·5	2·3	−43·3	867·8	558·6	1,094·9
TOTAL	1,920·3	2,443·3	2,173·2	2,988·8	2,009·0	95·6	121·6	108·2	148·8

[1] Expenditure includes net receipts of Land Registry in England and Wales and costs from the central administration of the offices of the Secretaries of State.

Table 3a
Identifiable general government expenditure 1987-88

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	632·1	194·3	97·4	152·8	1,076·6	58·7	18·0	9·0	14·2
Trade, industry, energy and employment	3,646·4	704·7	406·8	369·2	5,127·1	71·1	13·7	7·9	7·2
Roads and transport	3,761·5	589·1	333·5	108·6	4,792·7	78·5	12·3	7·0	2·3
Housing	2,981·1	716·9	225·9	336·6	4,260·5	70·0	16·8	5·3	7·9
Other environmental services	3,749·3	587·4	334·9	229·6	4,901·2	76·5	12·0	6·8	4·7
Law, order and protective services	5,094·1	643·6	277·2	592·1	6,607·0	77·1	9·7	4·2	9·0
Education and science	16,234·5	2,386·5	1,018·2	787·4	20,426·6	79·5	11·7	5·0	3·9
Arts and Libraries	666·1	78·0	37·8	0·0	781·9	85·2	10·0	4·8	0·0
Health and personal social services	19,711·0	2,665·9	1,256·1	810·1	24,443·1	80·6	10·9	5·1	3·3
Social Security	39,496·6	4,673·1	2,557·5	1,504·1	48,231·3	81·9	9·7	5·3	3·1
Miscellaneous[1]	−49·2	109·1	37·1	38·5	135·5	−36·3	80·5	27·4	28·4
TOTAL	95,923·5	13,348·6	6,582·4	4,929·0	120,783·5	79·4	11·1	5·4	4·1

Table 3b
Identifiable general government expenditure per head 1987-88

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	13·3	38·0	34·3	97·0	18·9	70·5	201·0	181·6	513·0
Trade, industry, energy and employment	76·9	137·8	143·4	234·4	90·1	85·4	153·1	159·3	260·3
Roads and transport	79·3	115·2	117·6	68·9	84·2	94·3	136·9	139·7	81·9
Housing	62·9	140·2	79·6	213·7	74·8	84·0	187·4	106·4	285·6
Other environmental services	79·1	114·9	118·1	145·8	86·1	91·9	133·5	137·2	169·3
Law, order and protective services	107·5	125·9	97·7	375·9	116·1	92·6	108·5	84·2	323·9
Education and science	342·5	466·8	359·0	499·9	358·8	95·4	130·1	100·1	139·3
Arts and Libraries	14·1	15·3	13·3	0·0	13·7	102·3	111·1	97·0	0·0
Health and personal social services	415·8	521·5	442·9	514·3	429·4	96·8	121·5	103·2	119·8
Social Security	833·1	914·1	901·7	954·9	847·2	98·3	107·9	106·4	112·7
Miscellaneous[1]	−1·0	21·3	13·1	24·4	2·4	−43·6	896·7	549·6	1,027·0
TOTAL	2,023·4	2,611·2	2,320·9	3,129·3	2,121·6	95·4	123·1	109·4	147·5

[1] Expenditure includes net receipts of Land Registry in England and Wales and costs from the central administration of the offices of the Secretaries of State.

Table 4a
Identifiable general government expenditure 1988-89

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	707·4	203·8	108·0	146·3	1,165·5	60·7	17·5	9·3	12·6
Trade, industry, energy and employment	3,773·2	660·0	405·8	770·6[1]	5,609·6	67·3	11·8	7·2	13·7
Roads and transport	3,904·7	596·1	338·8	112·1	4,951·7	78·9	12·0	6·8	2·3
Housing	2,120·3	644·7	172·8	334·3	3,272·1	64·8	19·7	5·3	10·2
Other environmental services	3,962·4	647·0	352·5	259·0	5,220·9	75·9	12·4	6·8	5·0
Law, order and protective services	5,741·0	715·4	309·4	637·1	7,402·9	77·6	9·7	4·2	8·6
Education and science	17,396·3	2,604·3	1,083·3	852·8	21,936·7	79·3	11·9	4·9	3·9
Arts and Libraries	795·0	92·3	41·9	0·0	292·2	85·6	9·9	4·5	0·0
Health and personal social services	21,789·2	2,968·9	1,390·9	889·1	27,038·1	80·6	11·0	5·1	3·3
Social security	40,270·9	4,697·8	2,745·9	1,567·3	49,281·9	81·7	9·5	5·6	3·2
Miscellaneous[2]	−57·1	115·8	40·1	47·1	145·9	−39·1	79·4	27·5	32·3

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
TOTAL	100,403·3	13,946·1	6,989·4	5,615·7	126,954·5	79·1	11·0	5·5	4·4

Table 4b
Identifiable general government expenditure per head 1988-89

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	14·9	40·0	37·8	92·7	20·4	72·9	195·9	185·1	453·9
Trade, industry, energy and employment	79·4	129·6	142·0	488·3[1]	98·3	80·7	131·8	144·5	496·7
Roads and transport	82·1	117·0	118·6	71·0	86·8	94·7	134·9	136·7	81·9
Housing	44·6	126·6	60·5	211·8	57·3	77·8	220·7	105·5	369·4
Other environmental services	83·4	127·0	123·4	164·1	91·5	91·1	138·8	134·9	179·4
Law, order and protective services	120·8	140·4	108·3	403·7	129·7	93·1	108·3	83·5	311·2
Education and science	366·0	511·2	379·2	540·4	384·4	95·2	133·0	98·6	140·6
Arts and Libraries	16·7	18·1	14·7	0·0	16·3	102·7	111·3	90·1	0·0
Health and personal social services	458·4	582·8	486·8	563·4	473·8	96·7	123·0	102·8	118·9
Social security	847·2	922·2	961·1	993·2	863·6	98·1	106·8	111·3	115·0
Miscellaneous[2]	−1·2	22·7	14·0	29·8	2·6	−47·0	889·1	549·0	1,167·4
TOTAL	2,112·1	2,737·8	2,446·4	3,558·5	2,224·7	94·9	123·1	110·0	160·0

[1] Includes £390 million (£247 per head) for costs associated with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc.
[2] Expenditure includes net receipts of Land Registry in England and Wales and costs from the central administration of the offices of the Secretaries of State.

Table 5a
Identifiable general government expenditure 1989-90

	£ million					As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	890·9	220·2	105·9	182·7	1,399·7	63·6	15·7	7·6	13·1
Trade, industry, energy and employment	3,676·6	648·9	362·0	[1]751·0	5,438·5	67·6	11·9	6·7	13·8
Roads and transport	4,624·5	696·9	346·5	130·8	5,798·7	79·8	12·0	6·0	2·3
Housing	3,365·7	645·1	169·6	267·2	4,447·6	75·7	14·5	3·8	6·0
Other environmental services	5,310·6	715·2	449·6	279·6	6,755·0	78·6	10·6	6·7	4·1
Law, order and protective services	6,482·2	808·1	329·1	697·6	8,317·0	77·9	9·7	4·0	8·4
Education and science	19,153·9	2,825·4	1,168·8	940·0	24,088·1	79·5	11·7	4·9	3·9
Arts and Libraries	910·6	101·1	48·5	0·0	1,060·2	85·9	9·5	4·6	0·0
Health and personal social services[1]	23,609·8	3,267·8	1,521·0	961·6	29,360·2	80·4	11·1	5·2	3·3
Social Security	42,616·6	5,024·3	2,907·3	1,700·5	52,248·7	81·6	9·6	5·6	3·3
Miscellaneous[2]	−1·7	126·3	49·7	59·0	233·3	−0·7	54·1	21·3	25·3
TOTAL	110,639.7	15,079·3	7,458·0	5,970·0	139,147·0	79·5	10·8	5·4	4·3

Table 5b
Identifiable public expenditure per head 1989-90

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	18·7	43·3	36·9	115·4	24·5	76·4	176·9	150·7	471·9
Trade, industry, energy and employment	77·1	127·5	126·0	[1]474·4	95·0	81·1	134·2	132·6	499·3
Roads and transport	97·0	136·9	120·6	82·6	101·3	95·7	135·1	119·0	81·6
Housing	70·6	126·7	59·0	168·8	77·7	90·8	163·1	76·0	217·2
Other environmental services	111·4	140·5	156·5	176·6	118·0	94·4	119·0	132·6	149·7

	£ per head					Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Law, order and protective services	135·9	158·7	114·5	440·7	145·3	93·5	109·2	78·8	303·3
Education and science	401·6	555·0	406·8	593·8	420·9	95·4	131·9	96·7	141·1
Arts and Libraries	19·1	19·9	16·9	0·0	18·5	103·1	107·2	91·1	0·0
Health and personal social services	495·1	641·9	529·4	607·5	513·0	96·5	125·1	103·2	118·4
Social Security	893·6	987·0	1,011·9	1,074·2	912·9	97·9	108·1	110·8	117·7
Miscellaneous[2]	0·0	24·8	17·3	37·3	4·1	−0·9	608·7	424·4	914·4
TOTAL	2,320·0	2,962·1	2,595·8	3,771·3	2,431·1	95·4	121·8	106·8	155·1

[1] Includes £305 million (£193 per head) for costs associated with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc.
[2] Expenditure includes net receipts of Land Registry in England and Wales and costs from the central administration of the offices of the Secretaries of State.

Table 6 General government expenditure analysed by territorial area and function 1989-90[1]
Identifiable expenditure

£ million

	England	Scotland (total)	Programme 15[2]	Scotland other	Wales (total)	Programme 16[2]	Wales other	Northern Ireland (total)	Programme 17[2]	Northern Ireland other[3]	Total	Non Identified	United Kingdom
Defence	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20,680·7	20,680·7
Overseas services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,537·6	2,537·6
Agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry	890·9	220·2	202·7	17·5	105·9	96·2	9·7	182·7	179·2	3·5	1,399·7	913·8	2,313·5
Trade, Industry, energy and employment	3,676·6	648·9	260·8	388·1	362·0	167·5	194·5	751·0	[4]751·0	0·0	5,438·5	2,728·4	8,166·9
Roads and transport	4,624·5	696·9	695·9	1·0	346·5	346·5	0·0	130·8	130·8	0·0	5,798·7	1,071·5	6,870·2
Housing	3,365·7	645·1	645·1	0·0	169·6	169·6	0·0	267·2	267·2	0·0	4,447·6	0·0	4,447·6
Other environmental services	5,310·6	715·2	709·4	5·8	449·6	444·6	5·0	279·6	279·6	0·0	6,755·0	511·7	7,266·7
Law, order and protective services	6,482·2	808·1	775·1	33·0	329·1	0·0	329·1	697·6	666·2	31·4	8,317·0	1,631·3	9,948·3
Education and science[5]	19,153·9	2,825·4	2,547·5	277·9	1,168·8	1,005·6	163·2	940·0	940·0	0·0	24,088·1	902·3	24,990·4
Arts and libraries[5]	910·6	101·1	101·1	0·0	48·5	48·5	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1,060·2	188·5	1,248·7
Health and personal social services	23,609·8	3,267·8	3,267·8	0·0	1,521·0	1,521·0	0·0	961·6	961·6	0·0	29,360·2	40·2	29,400·4
Social security	42,616·6	5,024·3	0·0	5,024·3	2,907·3	0·0	2,907·3	1,700·5	1,687·9	12·6	52,248·7	637·9	52,886·6
Miscellaneous[6]	−1·7	126·3	126·3	0·0	49·7	48·0	1·7	59·0	59·0	0·0	233·3	6,909·6	7,142·9
Total expenditure	110,639·7	15,079·3	9,331·7	5,747·6	7,458·0	3,847·5	3,610·5	5,970·0	5,922·5	47·5	139,147·0	38,753·5	177,900·5

[1] Items included in general government expenditure but not included within total expenditure on programmes (privatisation proceeds, general government debt interest and accounting adjustments) are treated as unidentified expenditure and not allocated to territories.
[2] Programmes 15, 16 and 17 relate to expenditure programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland covered by the respective chapters of the 1990 public expenditure White Paper (Cm 1015-1017).
[3] Responsibility for most expenditure in Northern Ireland rests with the Northern Ireland Office and Departments; this column includes certain expenditure in support of the agriculture and fishing industries, the costs of the Northern Ireland Court Service and War Pensions payments.
[4] Includes £305 million for costs associated with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc.
[5] Expenditure on arts and libraries in Northern Ireland is included with education and science.
[6] Includes contributions to European Communities and expenditure associated with general maintenance of government, such as tax collection and population registration.

Table 7a: General government expenditure[1] in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1985-86 to 1989-90

	£ million			Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)	
	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom identified	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
1985-86	107,277·2	4,414·3	111,691·5	96·0	4·0
1986-87	113,847·9	4,691·9	118,539·8	96·0	4·0
1987-88	120,706·2	4,885·4	125,591·6	96·1	3·9
1988-89	126,387·4	[2]5,645·5	132,032·9	95·7	4·3
1989-90	138,807·6	[3]6,004·3	144,811·9	95·9	4·1

Table 7b: General government expenditure per head[1] in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1985-86 to 1989-90

	£ per head			Index (United Kingdom identifiable expenditure = 100)	
	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom identified	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
1985-86	1,948·4	2,833·7	1,972·7	98·8	143·6
1986-87	2,062·6	3,013·8	2,088·7	98·8	144·3
1987-88	2,180·6	3,101·6	2,206·1	98·8	140·6
1988-89	2,277·8	[2]3,577·4	2,313·7	98·4	154·6
1989-90	2,494·2	[3]3,793·0	2,530·1	98·6	149·9

[1] The figures in these tables differ from those for identifiable expenditure given in Tables 1-6 because their coverage is wider; in particular some of the finance provided for nationalised industries is included.
[2] Includes £390 million (£247 per head) for costs associated with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc.
[3] Includes £305 million (£193 per head) for costs associated with the privatisation of Short Brothers plc.

Advertising

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing the amount spent in each of the last five years by his Department on *(a)* advertising in the press, *(b)* advertising on television and radio, *(c)* other advertising and promotion and *(d)* promotion videos and sound cassettes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Expenditure by the Treasury on promotional advertising is as follows:

1988-89 (Actual)	*1989-90 (Actual)*	*1990-91 (Budget/ Provision)*
£49,310	£52,568	£52,800

Notes:
[1] Figures for 1986-87 and 1987-88 are not readily available and could be given only at disproportionate cost.
[2] None of the expenditure shown in the table is for television or radio advertising.

Income Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in Treasury income during the 1991-92 financial year resulting from confining all income tax exemptions to an upper limit of 20 per cent.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the revenue yield in a full year from restricting income tax reliefs to an upper limit of 20 per cent. of gross income less personal allowances would be about £2¼ billion and some 6½ million taxpayers, of whom almost all currently pay at the basic rate, would pay more tax. These estimates are based on projections from the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional. They are based on an increase in personal allowances and the basic rate threshold of 10¼ per cent. in 1991-92 in line with the illustrative rates published in the 1990 autumn statement and do not take account of any behavioural changes that might result from the new regime.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of adults in each standard region together with the number of persons liable for the payment of poll tax at *(a)* the minimum rate, *(b)* a reduced rate and *(c)* the full rate.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Thousands

Standard Region	*Latest OPCS estimate of resident population June 1989*	*Number on Community Charges Register on 10 September 1990 subject to a personal charge on*	
		1 June 1990 Students	*10 September 1990 Others*[1]
Northern	2,376	34	2,300
North West	4,889	71	4,631
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,805	70	3,643
East Midlands	3,084	38	2,981
West Midlands	4,000	53	3,842
East Anglia	1,577	23	1,521
South West	3,643	40	3,511
South East	8,219	105	7,915
Greater London	5,246	93	5,078

[1]including full year equivalent of number contributing to collective community charge in 1990-91.

The difference between the OPCS figures, which are estimates based on the 1981 population census, and the numbers on the registers subject to a personal community charge may not equal the number of exemptions due to the different sources used to derive the figures and the different reference dates used.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review his decision not to take account of the use of balances to support revenue expenditure in 1990-91 in making his decisions on poll tax capping in 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: As I told the House on 3 December, the intentions for criteria announced on 31 October remain the Government's intended criteria for 1991-92. When my right hon. Friend comes to make his decisions on capping he will take into account all appropriate considerations.

Small Cetaceans

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to adhere to the conditions of the Berne convention by protecting the habitat of small cetaceans, and in particular the dolphin populations in the Moray firth and Cardigan bay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government fulfil their obligations under the Berne convention principally through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The 1981 Act, as subsequently amended, prohibits the deliberate killing, injuring or taking of all small cetacean species.

The Government's strategy for protection of the marine environment was set out in the environment White Paper —Cm. 1200. In accordance with the wildlife initiatives agreed in the ministerial declaration of the third North sea

conference in March this year, new research is being commissioned to improve knowledge of cetacean behaviour and to analyse tissue samples from stranded animals. Good progress is also being made on the preparation of an agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans in the Baltic and North seas under the Bonn convention on migratory species.

Homelessness

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of homeless persons aged 16 and 17 years.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985. Information on age is not collected and the Department has no such estimates.

The Mall

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when The Mall in London SW1 was first closed to traffic on Sundays; and what arrangements have been made since then to facilitate the flow of traffic which has to use other roads.

Mr. Trippier: The Mall was first closed to motor traffic on Sundays on 28 July 1968 for an experimental period. The arrangement was made permanent in April 1969 and extended to include the Queen Victoria memorial roundabout and Constitution hill. The Department has made no special arrangements for traffic flow on other roads in the royal parks.

Wheelchair and Mobility Housing

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of provision of wheelchair and mobility housing over the last 10 years.

Sir George Young: The figures for housing association and local authority wheelchair and mobility dwellings are shown in the table. Since October 1987, housing associations have been required to construct all new-build housing and rehabilitation schemes to mobility standards, wherever practicable. In addition, disabled people may obtain assistance for house adaptations under the new house renovation grants system introduced in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and this should help to increase the amount of housing suitable for people with disabilities. Local authorities' spending on home improvement grants for works to disabled persons' dwellings in England, increased from £2·547 million in 1980-81 to £51·549 million in 1988-89.

Housing and construction statistics
(Tables 6.1 and 6.7)
Numbers of dwellings (England): Starts

	Wheelchair		*Mobility*			
	Housing Association	*Local Authority or New Town*	*Housing Association*	*Local Authority or New Town*	*Total disabled dwellings*	*Total Housing Association/ Local Authority or New Town*
1979	129	576	2,316	5,950	8,971	68,972
1980	85	488	3,347	4,733	8,653	46,564
1981	16	256	40	1,926	2,238	78,136
1982	32	296	135	2,594	3,057	43,836
1983	31	357	53	2,639	3,080	42,259
1984	89	333	262	1,369	2,053	35,001
1985	34	263	125	1,420	3,895	28,980
1986	33	207	85	1,114	1,439	27,745
1987	27	165	121	947	1,260	25,052
1988	60	244	235	950	1,489	23,383
1989	42	188	328	543	1,101	22,588
1990[1]	67	69	102	469	723	15,295

[1] To third quarter.

Aggregates

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made on the revised guidelines for aggregates provision in England and Wales; and when they will be published for public consideration;

(2) if he will allow an opportunity for additional public consultation on a range of options for future aggregates provision before the regional aggregates working parties have finalised their commentaries on future supply requirements;

(3) if he will make it his policy to include reference to the fact that the demand for aggregates is not immutable in his revision of the guidelines for aggregates provision in England and Wales.

Mr. Yeo: Following the completion of the 1989 survey into aggregates production, sales and distribution my right hon. Friend proposes to revise "Guidelines for the Provision of Aggregates in England and Wales", MPG6. The survey will be published in the new year, together with a forecast of the future demand for primary aggregates. The implications of this will be discussed by the regional aggregates working parties during 1991. In particular they will consider the relevance of the forecast for the region, the land use planning implications and how future demand might be met.

Before publishing a revision of the present "Guidelines for the Provision of Aggregates in England and Wales", MPG6, my right hon. Friend will consider the views of the regional aggregates working parties, together with any other views which may be expressed. It is not intended to undertake a wider range of formal consultations until a draft of the revised guidelines is available, but my right hon. Friend will make available the information given to the regional aggregates working parties and will consider

any views that may be expressed about the future demand for aggregates before publishing the draft revised guidelines for full public consultation towards the end of 1991.

In considering future guidelines for aggregates provision, it will be important to consider a range of options. This will include the likely demand for aggregates and the extent to which use may be made of secondary materials such as colliery minestone and china clay sand as well as waste and recycled materials including power station ash, blast furnace slag and crushed concrete. Also to be taken into account will be the potential offered by marine sand and gravel and imports from outside England and Wales. My Department already has a number of research projects in hand to examine these options and the results will be important in the preparation of new guidelines.

It remains important that the minerals planning authorities should continue to implement the advice given in MPG6 which remains the current guidance on aggregates provision.

Building Surveyors

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present status of professional liability in relation to building surveyors.

Sir George Young: The professional liability of building surveyors, as of other construction professionals, is dealt with under common law, contract law and such Acts as the Latent Damage Act 1986.

Housing Investment Programmes

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make the allocations to local authorities in England for their housing investment programmes in 1991-92.

Sir George Young: Each housing authority is today being informed of its housing investment programme—HIP—allocation for 1991-92. Copies of the letters to local authorities and of the schedule of HIP allocations have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The local authority associations have been consulted about the distribution of housing capital allocations, including the construction of the generalised needs index —GNI—which has been further updated for 1991-92 following the comprehensive review last year. In particular, we have this year introduced a new indicator into the GNI to measure authorities' use of temporary accommodation. This helps to ensure that those authorities that face the most severe homelessness problems and that have had to meet them by using temporary accommodation receive additional resources to reflect their needs.

Local authority credit approvals and specified capital grant total £1,972 million in 1991-92. There are also £7 million of other capital grants. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 allows my right hon. Friend to take account of local authorities' capital receipts when making allocations, and the housing element of the receipts taken into account in this way is £276 million. Housing capital allocations for 1991-92 will therefore total £2,255 million.

After considering the views of the local authority associations, my right hon. Friend has concluded that the distribution of resources should be made on the following basis:

(i) £387 million to be allocated separately as supplementary credit approvals as follows:

(a) £115 million for the second year of the special homelessness initiative; local authorities in London and the south-east will shortly be invited to submit bids, particularly to bring empty homes back into use and for cash incentive schemes;

(b) £185 million of the total of £290 million available for the Estate Action programme, for new and some continuation schemes. In 1990-91, the HIP allocation of the 57 urban programme authorities included additional resources in the form of inner city special allocations. For 1991-92, my right hon. Friend has decided that these resources can be used more effectively if allocated as part of an enlarged Estate Action programme;

(c) £50 million for the new rural housing programme;

(d) £10 million for energy efficiency demonstration projects in the local authority stock;

(e) £25 million to provide against demand for mandatory grants in excess of authorities' available resources;

(f) £2 million to cover repairs to defective ex new town stock;

(ii) In addition to the £185 million of supplementary credit approvals for Estate Action, a further £105 million of annual capital guidelines—ACGs—for Estate Action continuation schemes is being allocated to authorities on the basis of agreed levels of commitment, as part of their main HIP allocations;

(iii) The remaining £1,756 million of the main HIP allocations, made up of the £1,343 million of housing ACGs and £413 million of resources for specified capital grant, has been distributed in two stages. First, the distribution to DOE regions has been made in proportion to the sum of the GNI scores of the local authorities in each region. Second, each region's total has been allocated to individual local authorities one half in proportion to each authority's GNI score, and one half following recommendations by the Department's regional housing controllers to reflect local needs and circumstances.

Under the new capital finance system, the Government issue forward indications of all-service annual capital guidelines for the second and third years of the public expenditure survey period. The indications for 1992-93 and 1993-94 will be issued as early as possible in the new year. However, to assist authorities in planning their housing investment programmes more than one year ahead, my right hon. Friend has decided to promulgate provisional figures for the housing element of the overall calculation with authorities' HIP allocations. The amounts for 1992-93 and 1993-94 are included in each authority's allocation letter.

Pollution

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made to date on implementing the provisions of the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989; what regulations have been laid; and what regulations he expects to lay arising from the Act.

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to the reply, 14 November 1990, c. 163]:* We have today published a consultation paper which sets out the basis on which we propose to implement the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989. The consultation paper includes a draft of the regulations

necessary to give effect to the registration of waste carriers and the procedure under which a waste regulation authority may seize a vehicle used for fly-tipping.

The registration of waste carriers is the first step in the implementation of the duty of care now contained in section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The main features of the system of registration which we propose to adopt are:

(a) Scope: The effect of the 1989 Act is to require anyone who transports waste in the course of a business, or in any other way for profit, to be registered. The proposed regulations will require each waste regulation authority to establish and maintain a register of carriers. Each carrier will be required to register with the authority for the area in which his principal place of business is situated. On acceptance, his registration will be valid throughout Great Britain;

(b) Duration: Each carrier's registration will last for three years. He will be reminded by the regulation authority of the need to apply for renewal of his registration;

(c) Refusal: A regulation authority will be able to refuse or revoke registration if the carrier or another relevant person has been convicted of a prescribed offence and, in the authority's opinion, it is undesirable for the carrier to be authorised to transport controlled waste. The draft regulations list the offences which we propose to prescribe. A carrier will have the right of appeal against an authority's refusal or revocation of his registration;

(d) Exemptions: Certain types of carrier will be exempted from the requirement to register. For example, producers in relation to the transport of waste which they have produced;

(e) Charges: Regulation authorities will be required to charge for their consideration of applications for registration and its renewal. The consultation paper invites comments on the level at which the charges should be set;

(f) The register: The registers maintained by regulation authorities will contain each carrier's application and entries listing other relevant information. Registers will be open to inspection free of charge by members of the public and must be indexed to enable information to be readily traced;

(g) Timetable: The 1989 Act and the proposed regulations will be brought into force in two stages. The first stage will come into force in May 1991 and will enable carriers to apply for registration. It is proposed that the second stage should come into force at the same time as the duty of care in April 1992. At that stage, it will become an offence to transport waste without registering and a carrier may be stopped and required to produce his certificate of registration.

The draft regulations also set out the procedure under which an authority will be able to apply for a warrant to seize a vehicle believed to have been used in the illegal disposal of waste. The purpose of this procedure is to aid the detection and prosecution of those involved in fly-tipping. It is not concerned with the punitive confiscation of vehicles. An authority will be required to return a vehicle to a claimant who satisfactorily establishes his entitlement to it. However, once the authority has established that person's entitlement it will be considerably better placed to ascertain the identity of the person using the vehicle when the waste was disposed of illegally.

Comments on the draft regulations are invited by 28 February 1991. I am arranging for copies of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Trent Regional Health Authority

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected figure for the closure of acute medical and surgical beds in the Trent regional health authority by March 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for this information.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing staff have been made redundant or redeployed; how many support staff have been made redundant; how many full-time posts have been converted to part-time posts; and what increase in administrative jobs there have been with the introduction of the health Bill in the Trent regional health authority last year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provisional figure for administration and clerical staff, including general and senior managers, for Trent region for September 1990 shows an increase of 750 whole-time equivalents. It is not known centrally what proportion of these posts relates to the implementation of the Government's White Paper "Working for \Patients". The remaining information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Sir Michael Carlisle, the chairman of Trent regional health authority, for further information.

Young Offenders

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to increase the level of financial support to secure units for young offenders in Merseyside.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of secure accommodation for children in care, including those who are offenders or alleged offenders, is a matter for individual local authorities. We are always prepared to consider applications for grant aid to fund the capital provision of new secure units where the need for such provision has been identified. We are not aware of current plans to increase the stock of secure accommodation in Merseyside, although we understand local authorities within that region are reviewing the position.

Myodil

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Myodil still has a product licence for export; and what information he has on whether Glaxo is still exporting it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: For medicinal products exported from the United Kingdom the requirements are set by the importing country. A product licence is not always required for exports.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when Myodil was given a reviewed product licence; on what subsequent dates was the licence renewed; what evidence was presented at the time the reviewed licence was given; and what consideration was given to adverse reactions to Myodil;

(2) what clinical trials have been carried out on Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A review application for Myodil was received in the early 1980s. Numerous clinical trials have been conducted with Myodil, examining its value in a number of diagnostic procedures including myelography and ventriculography. A substantial body of evidence in relation to iophendylate, the active ingredient of Myodil, has been published in well over 300 citations spanning a period of over 40 years. This included information relating to adverse reactions associated with the use of Myodil.

The review included examination of evidence that the product was of an appropriate standard of safety, quality and efficacy. A reviewed product licence, valid for five years, was granted in 1987.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in what ways were the warnings regarding the use of Myodil drawn to the attention of doctors; and whether any steps were taken by his Department or by health authorities to ensure that no doctor giving a spinal injection of Myodil could be unaware of them;

(2) whether his Department, the Committee on Safety of Medicines or the Committee on the Review of Medicines ever issued warnings to radiologists about adverse reactions to Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I know of no warnings being issued by the Department, health authorities, the Committee on Safety of Medicines or the Committee on the Review of Medicines to radiologists about adverse reaction to Myodil. Information was already available to them in package inserts and the data sheet which were updated as appropriate in the light of accumulating knowledge. It is for doctors who use a product to ensure that they are fully familiar with the benefits and the risks of any procedure or treatment.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what precise warnings regarding the use of Myodil and the possibility of subsequent adverse reactions were given by the manufacturer, Glaxo; what changes there have been in the warnings; and when they were made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the package insert dated March 1972, serious adverse reactions were reported to be rare provided that a suitable technique was used; references were made to the removal of Myodil after myelography. The reactions listed included frequent headaches, sometimes severe with vomiting and photophobia after myelography, pyrexia, neck stiffness, low back pain and exacerbation of previous symptoms such as those of sciatica. The leaflet also referred to occasional reports of arachnoiditis and literature reports of adhesions and fibrous exudates being found on operation in patients who had at some stage undergone myelography with Myodil.

In the revised package insert dated November 1973 it was, in addition, recommended that the material be removed by aspiration after the myelography unless required for further study. Information on adverse reactions was enlarged to detail its irritant or allergenic potential. Advice was given that if low back pain persisted or previous symptoms of sciatica were exacerbated, any residual Myodil should be removed and where warranted, hydrocortisone sodium succinate injected intrathecally.

The data sheets introduced in the 1980s further emphasised the importance of removing as much Myodil as possible at the time of myelography.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the approximate number of people who have developed arachnoiditis after the use of Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Myelography is often a prelude to surgery for lumbar disc disease. In consequence, it is difficult to disassociate the effects of the original disease from those of the pre-operative myelography or the surgery. The frequency of symptoms compatible with arachnoiditis varies in different publications and it is clear that there is a poor correlation between symptoms and pathology. For these reasons, it is not possible to estimate the number of people who may have developed arachnoiditis as a result of the use of Myodil.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in the last full year it was available, how many spinal investigations using Myodil were carried out in national health service hospitals;

(2) what information he has regarding the approximate number of people who have been injected with the spinal dye Myodil since it was marketed to its withdrawal.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the types of spinal investigations for which Myodil was used.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Myodil was used for the following spinal investigations:

(a) Investigation of low back pain.
(b) Investigation of cervical, dorsal and lumbar disc disease and
(c) Investigation of suspected compressive abnormalities of the spinal canal.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what sources his Department has received information about adverse reactions to the spinal dye Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has received information on adverse reactions to Myodil from a variety of sources including spontaneous reports from the medical profession, published literature and from the manufacturer.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many yellow card reports there have been indicating a possible association between the spinal dye Myodil and the disease arachnoiditis; and when the first report was received;

(2) if he will list the adverse reactions associated with the spinal dye Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Committee on Safety of Medicines has received a total of 73 yellow card reports in association with the use of Myodil, the first one being in 1970. Arachnoiditis was mentioned in 11 reports, the first in March 1972. In addition to arachnoiditis, the reports have included meningeal reactions which were self-limiting in most cases and local reactions either due to the procedure or the dye such as lumbar pain and leg pain. It is important to stress that the report of a reaction suspected in association with the use of a drug does not necessarily imply a cause and effect relationship.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to withdraw the product licence for Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Myodil was withdrawn from the market by the company for commercial reasons and the Licensing Authority has been notified of its action. There are no plans to withdraw the product licence for Myodil.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what date alternatives to Myodil were first available; what they were; and what assessment was made of the degree to which they were risk free.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Myodil was licensed with the following clinical indications:

Myelography
Ventriculography:
visualisation of the third and fourth ventricles and the aqueduct of sylvius.
Intra-uterine use:
to outline the foetus prior to intra-uterine blood transfusion.

The following is a list of products which are licensed for one or more of the same indications:

Isovist 190
Isovist 240
Isovist 300
Niopam 200 Injection
Niopam 300 Injection
Omnipaque 180 mgi/ml Injection
Amipaque Powder for Injection
Iopamidol 300 Injection

The availability of any particular drug is a matter for the companies concerned.

Every application for a product licence is considered individually and must satisfy the Licensing Authority as to its safety, quality and efficacy before a licence is granted.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures for spinal investigation have been used following the withdrawal of Myodil; and what is their cost relative to Myodil.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The procedures listed have been used for spinal investigations following the withdrawal from use of Myodil:

(a) the use of water-soluble contrast media.
(b) Computed tomography without and with contrast media
and
(c) Magnetic resonance imaging.

No costings are available relative to that of using Myodil.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the Committee on Safety of Medicines has at any time discussed Myodil;

(2) whether any evidence on safety has been presented to the Committee on the Review of Medicines since Myodil was first given its reviewed product licence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following completion of the review, it would be the Committee on Safety of Medicines rather than the Committee on the Review of Medicines which would be consulted if the known safety profile of a product changed so as to cause alarm. This has not been the case with Myodil.

Non-pasteurised Milk

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made on the health implications of the consumption of non-pasteurised milk; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has regarding incidents of illness or disease in England and Wales in the last 10 years which can be attributed to the consumption of non-pasteurised milk.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department keeps under continual review the health implications arising from the consumption of untreated milk in the light of the incidence of human illness associated with it. Since 1985, the retail outlets through which untreated milk can be sold in England and Wales have been severely restricted. There was a public consultation in 1989 on whether a total ban on the sale of untreated milk should be introduced. In view of the strong response from consumers who wished to continue to drink untreated milk, the Government decided not to proceed with the ban but to introduce new testing and labelling requirements to ensure that risks to health are minimised and to enable consumers to make an informed choice on whether to drink this product. New test requirements on microbiological examination were introduced on 1 April 1990 and from 1 September 1990 all such milk has been required to carry a clear warning

"This milk has not been heat-treated and may therefore contain organisms harmful to health".

This enables consumers to make an informed decision on whether to use the product.

In the period 1980 to 1989, there were 112 confirmed outbreaks, accounting for 2,776 cases, of food-borne diseases associated with raw cows' milk reported to the public health laboratory service's communicable disease surveillance centre.

NHS Employees

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has completed consideration of the case for further guidance to be issued to national health service employees with private practice interests in potential competition with their work in income-generating departments in the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials are currently working on guidance on conflict of interests to be issued to national health service authorities in due course.

Pressure Sores

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his most up-to-date estimate of the cost to the national health service of treating a pressure sore.

Mr. Dorrell: No specific figures or sufficiently detailed data on which to base a realistic estimate are collected centrally.

Organ Donors

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any financial assistance is provided to the next of kin of organ donors for the cost of the subsequent funeral arrangements.

Mr. Dorrell: No.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the total cost of removing a range of organs from a donor whose next of kin has consented to organ donations; how many transplant teams will be involved; and what is the approximate time an operating theatre will be required.

Mr. Dorrell: The resources required to remove organs depend on a number of factors such as the donor's medical condition. We are currently considering the possibility of identifying the costs incurred in organ donation.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many neuro-intensive care units in

England and Wales are involved in transplantation; and how many have produced organ donors in the past five years, unit by unit.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally in the form requested.

Gloucester District Health Authority

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the size of population served by Gloucester district health authority in 1979 and 1990, and the proportion of the population aged over 60 years in 1979 and 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated resident population of Gloucester district health authority at mid-1989, the latest date for which an estimate is available, is 315,800 of whom 21·1 per cent. are aged 60 and over. The estimated population for the same area at mid-1979 is 297,600, of whom 19·3 per cent. were aged 60 and over.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by category the number of staff employed by the Gloucester district health authority *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the figures for 1982 and 1989.

Due to the reorganisation of health authority boundaries in 1982, information on the number of staff employed by health authorities in Gloucestershire prior to this date is not comparable with later years. The hon. Member may wish to write to Ms. R. Frichie, the chairman of Gloucester health authority, for information in 1990, which is not held centrally.

NHS Staff in Post by Main Staff Groups at 30 September for 1982 and 1989 Gloucester District Health Authority

Main Staff Groups	*Whole-time Equivalents*[1] *1982*	*1989*
Medical and Dental[2]	170	130
Nursing and Midwifery[3]	2,330	2,370
Professional and Technical (Excluding Works)	400	450
Works	20	10
Maintenance	120	80
Administrative and Clerical (Including Managers)	530	590
Ambulance	230	240
Ancillary	900	640
Total	4,690	4,530

Source: Department of health (SM13) annual censuses of NHS medical and non-medical manpower.

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10 whole-time equivalents.

[2] Includes Permanent Paid Honorary staff and locums. Excludes Consultants and Senior Registrars in Non-Teaching District Health Authorities and Senior Registrars in Teaching District Health Authorities. These still have their contract with the RHA.

[3] Includes agency staff.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide the number of hospital beds available in the Gloucester district health authority area in 1979 and 1990 and the projected total for 1992.

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1979 and 1989-90, the average daily number of beds in national health service hospitals in Gloucester district health authority, taking boundary changes into account, reduced from 2,192 to 1,664. Over the period 1979 to 1989-90 the total number of in-patient discharges and deaths and day case attendances rose by 26 per cent. from 33,000 to 42,000.

The hon. Member may wish to write to Ms. R. Frichie, the chairman of Gloucester health authority, for estimates for 1992 which are not held centrally.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the extent of FIV infection in cats and the potential threat to human health.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Feline immunodeficiency virus—FIV—has been identified in cat populations in numerous countries, but it is most prevalent in free-roaming cats. Most cats recover from the disease but become lifelong carriers of the virus. The infection rate in the limited surveys that have taken place in the United Kingdom has ranged from 5 to 23 per cent. of the cats tested. There is no evidence to link FIV to any human disease.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Welfare

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those husbandry systems he described as unacceptable in his answer to the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) of 25 July, *Official Report*, column *251*.

Mr. Maclean: The systems were described in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's assessment of pig production systems. The council drew attention in particular to the welfare problems with stall and tether systems for dry sows, the "sweat box" system for keeping growing pigs and multi-tier cages for weaners.

Expert Advisory Committees

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now establish a register of interests for members of Government expert advisory committees.

Mr. Maclean: The interests which members of the Veterinary Products Committee have in the pharmaceutical industry are published each year in its annual report of which copies are in the Library. Independent members of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides are currently appointed on the basis that they have no interests in the pesticides industry. But in order to widen the pool of expertise available we are now considering replacing this restriction by the introduction of a system based on a register of declared interests. We are considering this issue in relation to other committees advising on food safety matters, but have not reached a conclusion.

Food Surveillance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure a consumer representative sits on the steering group on food surveillance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The steering group on food surveillance advises the Government on the detailed scientific aspects

of their food chemical surveillance work. The members of the group are experts who are individually qualified to contribute to this work. Specific consumer protection issues which arise are considered by the Food Advisory Committee which has consumer representatives amongst its members.

Farmers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which specific EEC regulations exist to allow the provision of financial assistance to farmers adversely affected by structural changes.

Mr. Curry: Council regulation 797/85, as amended by Council regulations 3827/85, 2224/86, 1760/87, 1094/88, 1137/88, 591/89, 1609/89, 3808/89, 752/90 and 2176/90 and Commission regulation 2156/89, covers a wide range of structural measures available to farmers generally. Regulations 1696/71, 1035/72, and 1360/78, 389/82 and 1096/88, all of which were also amended by regulation 3808/89, deal with structural measures which are specific to particular sectors or countries other than the United Kingdom. In addition, there is a specific income aids scheme covered by Council regulations 768/89 and 3813/89 as amended by regulation 1279/90.

Seals and Dolphins

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent the disappearance of seal and dolphins from United Kingdom waters.

Mr. Curry: Seals are given basic protection against indiscriminate killing by the Conservation of Seals Act 1970. The Government have by order extended this safeguard in the wake of the recent viral epidemic which in particular has affected the common seal. The United Kingdom populations of seals number over 100,000.

Dolphins are protected against deliberate capture by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Whaling Industry (Regulation) Act 1934. A United Kingdom initiative led to the adoption by the North sea conference forum earlier this year of a plan concerned with conservation of all species of small cetacean.

Food Industry

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage the food industry to reduce the levels of sugar in foods.

Mr. Curry: Following the recommendations of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy report on dietary sugars and human disease and the advice contained in the recent Government publication "Eight Guidelines for a Healthy Diet", both of which are available in the Library of the House, the food industry is responding to consumers' demand by providing a wide and increasing range of less sugary foods. We are continuing to encourage the declaration of total sugars as part of nutrition declarations which now commonly appear on food labels so that consumers can make informed choices.

Irish sea

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for which countries the Hague preference applies in the Irish sea; if he will apply to have the Hague preference extended to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement about fish quotas in the Irish sea for 1991.

Mr. Curry: The Hague preference areas are the northern parts of the United Kingdom which includes Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In the Irish sea, Hague preference is provided for cod, whiting, plaice and sole for both countries but for each of these the trigger point for the preference is higher for the Republic of Ireland.

The Commission's proposals for TACs and quotas for 1991 for the Irish sea which are set out in an un-numbered explanatory memorandum of 11 December, will be considered by the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 19 December. Under these proposals if they were to be agreed unchanged the Republic of Ireland could invoke Hague preference for cod, whiting and plaice.

Mink

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in each of the last three years his inspectors have supervised, examined or monitored the slaughter of farmed mink by injection.

Mr. Maclean: Officers of the state veterinary service monitored the slaughter of mink by injection once in 1988 and once in 1989. At the visits to fur farms so far in 1990, at which slaughter was observed on four occasions, the method used was gassing rather than injection.

Slaughter

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *316*, how he ensures that slaughter of livestock other than in a licensed abattoir is carried out with due care and humanity.

Mr. Maclean: On-farm slaughter is an unpredictable event and, as such, cannot be routinely monitored. Officers of the state veterinary service are available to advise on humane slaughter to ensure that livestock owners are able to meet their legal obligations.

Soil Erosion

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department will initiate research into the extent to which soil erosion contributes to the deposition of phosphates in water courses.

Mr. Curry: This Department is currently reviewing the need for further research into this matter.

Soil Survey and Land Research Centre

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reductions in funding and staffing of the Soil Survey are proposed for 1990-91.

Mr. Curry: No reduction in funding of the Soil Survey and Land Research Centre has taken place in 1990-91. In the current financial year the Department will be spending £552,800 on research at the Soil Survey and Land Research Centre. Changes in staffing arrangements are regarded as an internal matter to be handled solely by the Soil Survey and Land Research Centre's management.

Water Erosion

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if a report on the 1989-90 water erosion monitoring scheme will be published;

(2) if he proposes to continue his Department's water erosion monitoring scheme in 1991.

Mr. Curry: The research project into the control of water erosion in arable crops, began in 1988-89 and the first year's work is being evaluated. The project is due for review in 1992, when the results will be published.

Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the result of the laboratory test for spongiform encephalopathy carried out on the antelope calf which died at London zoo on 12 November.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 28 November 1990, c. 441]:* The examination of the brain tissue of the greater kudu put down at London zoo on 13 November has been carried out by the central veterinary laboratory and a spongiform encephalopathy has been confirmed.

The animal was born in April 1989 and was the offspring of a greater kudu in which a similar encephalopathy was confirmed in August 1989. Investigations into the cause of the disease in this kudu are continuing.

Pentobarbitone

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations govern the use of pentobarbitone; and what restrictions are placed on its purchase, ownership and use.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

Pentobarbitone is a barbiturate compound which is used as a sedative and anaesthetic in clinical and veterinary practice. It is used particularly in the killing and putting down of animals. Supply and possession of the drug are subject to restrictions under both the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Medicines Act 1968. The effect is that it may be purchased for professional use by medical, dental and veterinary practitioners and by others against a prescription issued by a practitioner; and any person may lawfully possess the drug for medical, dental or veterinary purposes in accordance with the directions of a practitioner. Under the Misuse of Drugs Act, the unlawful possession of pentobarbitone is punishable, on indictment, by up to five years' imprisonment or a fine—or both.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Vietnam (Aid)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the restrictions on aid to Vietnam; and if he has proposals to lift them.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have no direct aid programme for Vietnam and no immediate plans to begin one. However, I am keeping this question under review. We provide financial support to British non-governmental organisations for projects in Vietnam through our joint funding scheme, under which we meet 50 per cent. of costs, and through a special scheme for two northern provinces of Vietnam from which most of the boat people came, under which the Overseas Development Administration meets 80 per cent. of costs. The European Community is now preparing to provide reintegration assistance for boat people returnees and the Goverment will contribute to the cost.

Southern Africa

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid each OECD donor has given to the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference and for which Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference programme since 1985.

Mrs. Chalker: Full details of other donors' assistance to the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference is not readily available. Net official development assistance from OECD donors to the member states of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference from 1985 to 1988, the last year for which figures are available, is as set out in the tables.

Net official development assistance 1985 (£ million)

DAC countries	*Angola*	*Botswana*	*Lesotho*	*Malawi*	*Mozambique*	*Namibia*	*Swaziland*	*Tanzania*	*Zambia*	*Zimbabwe*	*Total*
Australia	—	0·35	0·21	0·35	1·07	0·02	0·25	3·13	1·67	3·18	10·24
Austria	1·06	—	—	—	2·20	—	—	0·32	0·19	0·35	4·12
Belgium	0·10	0·03	0·04	0·02	1·00	0·03	0·07	2·81	1·03	0·41	5·54
Canada	1·37	3·79	3·96	3·32	3·68	−0·89	3·39	23·44	8·42	13·37	63·85
Denmark	0·69	1·70	1·33	3·95	4·67	—	−0·01	28·56	4·75	4·60	50·23
Finland	0·16	0·02	0·36	0·02	2·43	1·06	—	12·82	9·11	3·44	29·41
France	1·04	0·26	0·16	2·49	15·65	—	0·54	1·13	0·52	4·07	25·23
Germany	1·91	10·17	6·29	9·15	3·72	1·07	1·34	25·37	14·45	21·06	94·52
Ireland	—	—	2·27	—	—	—	—	2·14	1·84	0·27	6·52
Italy	12·58	0·01	0·56	0·04	21·57	—	0·23	26·86	1·00	5·76	68·62
Japan	—	0·02	0·52	3·76	3·36	—	0·58	21·97	31·82	6·59	68·61
Netherlands	6·21	1·62	0·62	2·01	19·15	0·09	0·33	28·48	12·10	13·68	84·28
New Zealand	—	0·01	—	0·01	—	—	—	0·04	0·01	0·01	0·07
Norway	0·23	8·53	0·59	0·35	10·38	0·20	0·14	35·04	12·87	6·43	80·76
Sweden	14·43	5·65	5·31	—	26·20	—	—	37·78	17·65	18·15	125·18
Switzerland	0·65	0·03	0·52	0·03	2·72	—	0·02	4·67	3·40	1·67	13·70
United Kingdom	0·16	4·89	2·35	10·68	7·26	0·60	0·59	17·43	17·59	18·98	80·54
United States of America	5·40	8·49	14·66	4·63	36·26	—	6·17	15·43	27·77	43·20	161·99
DAC total	45·99	45·56	39·76	40·81	167·30	2·19	13·64	287·42	166·19	165·21	974·06

Net official development assistance 1986 (£'million)

DAC countries	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Namibia	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Total
Australia	—	0·30	0·16	0·26	2·23	0·03	0·11	2·03	0·29	1·19	7·47
Austria	0·82	0·01	0·01	—	0·74	0·05	0·01	0·49	0·25	0·37	3·10
Belgium	0·12	0·11	0·04	0·02	0·19	—	0·42	2·18	0·99	0·54	5·21
Canada	2·56	5·17	1·19	0·98	3·61	—	1·04	18·54	9·10	7·62	56·34
Denmark	3·06	4·37	1·25	2·37	9·37	—	1·86	37·44	6·59	6·50	82·59
Finland	0·76	0·27	0·29	0·10	3·64	1·61	0·01	19·72	11·33	2·93	45·01
France	4·26	1·04	0·27	2·60	19·48	0·03	0·67	1·36	2·24	3·49	40·08
Germany	2·82	8·50	8·17	19·83	7·78	1·38	1·96	30·68	22·19	27·83	148·34
Ireland	—	0·07	2·48	0·01	0·01	—	0·03	1·90	1·90	0·44	7·71
Italy	21·52	0·18	0·86	1·58	37·98	0·30	0·47	19·16	9·29	3·52	107·29
Japan	0·32	0·84	0·43	10·98	10·57	—	0·35	23·87	35·61	2·96	97·20
Netherlands	11·44	3·15	0·67	3·83	24·59	0·15	0·53	41·42	32·36	16·48	152·27
New Zealand	—	0·05	0·01	—	—	—	—	0·05	—	0·02	0·15
Norway	0·20	7·98	0·49	0·03	21·69	0·16	—	48·98	19·58	11·15	124·72
Sweden	10·12	11·11	4·56	—	46·96	—	1·67	72·56	30·29	14·22	216·60
Switzerland	0·89	0·13	0·60	0·01	2·18	—	—	13·11	0·14	2·37	21·98
United Kingdom	0·31	5·61	3·75	7·85	6·18	0·74	2·31	11·53	29·99	10·46	89·05
United States of America	4·77	6·82	12·96	7·50	20·46	—	5·46	5·46	25·92	18·41	121·88
DAC total	63·99	55·91	38·19	57·95	217·66	4·45	16·90	350·49	238·07	130·49	1,328·00

Net official development assistance 1987 (£'million)

DAC countries	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Namibia	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Total
Australia	0·01	0·32	0·02	0·08	2·89	0·01	0·37	1·21	0·22	0·49	7·10
Austria	0·86	0·01	0·02	—	2·58	—	0·34	1·64	1·40	0·17	8·44
Belgium	0·08	0·92	0·01	0·02	0·59	—	0·21	1·29	4·42	0·60	10·30
Canada	0·28	6·49	1·52	4·58	14·75	0·03	1·06	21·99	15·66	6·18	91·70
Denmark	3·68	11·34	0·98	7·12	9·06	1·83	3·92	30·02	2·14	4·99	94·90
Finland	1·70	0·13	0·18	0·14	3·91	3·81	0·02	20·86	16·05	4·35	67·20
France	2·28	1·71	1·62	3·03	24·02	0·09	0·20	3·13	0·95	8·95	58·15
Germany	3·66	13·02	6·43	18·05	18·10	2·42	2·26	36·75	22·71	27·14	190·30
Ireland	—	0·04	2·70	0·01	0·01	0·01	0·04	1·86	2·02	0·68	9·31
Italy	17·32	0·03	0·84	2·39	82·57	—	0·45	119·45	22·04	15·92	329·97
Japan	0·84	0·06	1·32	31·44	10·73	—	0·10	28·10	25·43	5·38	130·73
Netherlands	9·51	3·29	1·04	6·61	30·90	0·34	0·44	45·24	18·03	21·53	173·10
New Zealand	—	0·12	—	—	—	—	—	0·07	—	0·07	0·33
Norway	0·54	10·37	0·16	0·09	21·55	0·06	0·29	45·91	19·49	13·44	141·45
Sweden	14·50	8·68	4·97	0·20	33·24	—	0·16	45·67	15·52	20·08	182·07
Switzerland	0·49	0·02	0·84	0·39	14·28	—	0·04	10·35	0·98	0·58	35·36
United Kingdom	0·26	6·51	3·88	19·31	21·55	0·97	1·24	23·76	23·49	9·98	140·26
United States of America	3·66	12·81	11·59	10·37	33·56	—	7·32	0·61	23·75	21·36	154·28
DAC total	59·66	75·87	38·13	103·83	326·29	9·55	18·12	438·92	211·31	161·89	1,824·94

Net official development assistance 1988 (£'million)

DAC countries	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Malawi	Mozambique	Namibia	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe	Total
Australia	—	0·84	—	—	6·15	—	—	1·67	1·76	0·76	15·35
Austria	0·36	0·01	0·02	0·01	0·75	—	—	1·02	0·38	0·16	3·72
Belgium	0·21	0·06	0·01	0·06	0·94	—	0·25	3·76	2·77	0·69	12·03
Canada	3·34	3·46	1·27	3·19	16·70	—	0·98	17·04	17·06	8·81	98·72
Denmark	2·39	3·93	2·62	2·35	8·98	—	2·19	43·68	4·65	6·94	107·09
Finland	0·73	0·21	0·10	0·04	10·30	2·30	0·01	37·74	13·38	1·75	91·46
France	3·26	0·75	2·35	1·97	13·94	0·01	0·02	1·48	0·83	6·16	42·28
Germany	4·03	8·04	5·95	15·28	13·80	4·36	1·58	38·21	29·19	22·53	196·46
Ireland	—	—	1·95	0·03	0·04	—	0·06	2·08	1·57	0·33	8·31
Italy	13·66	1·04	0·19	2·97	160·98	—	2·30	43·19	22·17	6·20	347·24
Japan	−1·12	11·53	0·67	21·41	8·32	—	0·02	54·29	50·86	14·67	220·74
Netherlands	6·98	2·43	—	6·07	27·71	0·71	1·07	44·28	14·47	12·21	139·32
New Zealand	—	0·03	—	—	—	—	—	0·21	0·02	—	0·35
Norway	2·53	10·12	2·52	1·34	25·09	0·06	0·07	44·38	22·59	13·32	167·66
Sweden	18·33	11·86	3·64	0·04	46·32	—	—	56·24	20·09	12·96	232·88
Switzerland	0·97	—	0·89	0·02	3·62	—	—	8·13	0·12	0·69	19·83
United Kingdom	0·51	7·08	4·88	29·79	29·26	2·03	−1·39	33·20	16·59	17·06	191·03
United States of America	3·37	8·98	11·79	16·84	33·68	—	5·61	8·42	10·11	5·61	143·48
DAC total	59·54	70·38	38·84	101·60	406·60	9·47	12·77	439·02	228·60	130·87	2,057·94

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the EC has given to SADCC since 1985; and for which programmes.

Mrs. Chalker: SADCC's allocation under the sixth European development fund—1985-1990—is 141 mecu (about £99 million). Sixty-nine mecu of this has been committed so far, to the following projects:

Karonga-Ibanda Road
Beira Port Rehabilitation
Tazama Pipeline Rehabilitation
Land/Water Management Training Centre
Mananga Agricultural Management Training
Inchope-Machipanda Road

In addition SADCC member countries were allocated a total of 776 mecu—about £543 million—in their EDF VI national indicative programmes. Under the seventh European development fund—1990-1995—SADCC has received an initial allocation of 121 mecu—about £85 million—to be focused mainly on transport, food and agriculture and SADCC member countries have been allocated a total of a further 1,007 mecu—£705 million—in their national indicative programmes.

Poland

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all aid currently being given by the United Kingdom to Poland.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 10 December at column *281*.

UNRWA

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Her Majesty's Government have donated to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The amounts are as follows:

	£ million
1979	4·4
1980	4·5
1981	5·0
1982	5·0
1983	5·0
1984	6·0
1985	5·0
1986	5·0
1987	[1]5·25
1988	5·25
1989	[2]5·623
1990	[2]5·64

[1] Includes a total of £1·25 million earmarked for Lebanon.
[2] Includes a total of £263,000 for a feasibility study commissioned by UNRWA from Llewelyn-Davies Planning Limited.

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid Her Majesty's Government have provided to Kurdish refugees for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: As I informed the House on 2 April at column *415*, the Government have provided two grants totalling £550,000 to assist Iraqi Kurds in Turkey and ethnic Turkish refugees from Bulgaria. The first grant of £250,000 was made in November 1988 and the second of £300,000 in July 1989. Both grants were provided through the Turkish Red Crescent Society. There have been no further developments.

Lebanon

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid Her Majesty's Government have provided to Palestinian and other local refugees in Lebanon for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The humanitarian assistance that we have provided is as follows:

£ thousands

	Via British NGOs	*Via ICRC*	*Via UNRWA*
1979	—	—	—
1980	4	—	—
1981	—	—	—
1982	—	100	—
1983	—	400	—
1984	—	500	1,000
1985	1	500	—
1986	8	150	—
1987	—	400	250
1988	—	200	—
1989	—	—	—
1990			

A proportion of the United Kingdom annual contribution to UNRWA's general programmes is also spent in Lebanon. Details of that spending are, I regret, unavailable.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Leaflets

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were his reasons for producing the leaflet, "Get It Right Before You Go"; and whether a request for such a leaflet was received from consumer or tourist groups.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The "Get It Right Before You Go" leaflets are a Foreign and Commonwealth Office initiative. They aim to improve understanding of what consuls can do and to encourage self-help, including adequate insurance and safeguarding of money, passports and tickets by British holidaymakers in order to reduce common, avoidable problems.

Reducing the pressure on consular staff overseas enables them to respond quickly and comprehensively to British nationals needing help in real emergencies.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated annual cost of producing the consular leaflet, "Get It Right Before You Go".

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Design and printing costs for the new leaflet "Checklist for Travellers—Get It Right Before You Go" will be £28,000. Additionally, the Post Office's

charges for distributing the leaflet with the estimated 2·2 million new British visitor's passports issued annually will be £132,000.

Reprint and distribution costs for the original leaflet "Consular Assistance Abroad—Get It Right Before You Go", mainly issued through travel agents, are around £20,000.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether consular services abroad are described in leaflets or documents available from his Department other than in the leaflet, "Get It Right Before You Go".

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are two "Get It Right Before You Go" leaflets: "Consular Assistance Abroad" and "Checklist for Travellers" and both give general travel advice. The former also explains what a consul can and cannot do for a Briton in trouble abroad, while the latter concentrates on a few key messages, including adequate insurance and safeguarding valuables.

Consular services abroad are also described in the annual review of consular work, but this is not targeted at British holidaymakers and does not include travel guidance.

South Atlantic Fisheries

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to impose a 12-mile fishing limit around South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The extension of the territorial sea of South Georgia to 12 nautical miles came into effect on 1 January 1990.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of the agreements signed with other nations to fish in the south Atlantic.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There are no agreements to fish in the south Atlantic between the United Kingdom or its dependent territories and other states. Some agreements have, however, been signed between the Governments of certain dependent territories and private fishing companies or associations.

In addition there are European Community agreements, entered into on behalf of all member states, which have been signed with Angola, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Equatorial, Ivory Coast, Sao Tome and Principle, and Senegal. Copies of proposals for these agreements will have been made available to the House through the normal procedure for European Community documents and the final agreements appear in the *Official Journal* of the European Community.

Punjab

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Indian Government concerning human rights violations in the Punjab; what information his Department has as to the number of people arrested, injured or killed by security forces in the last two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the Indian Government in their efforts to deal with a serious challenge from terrorist violence in the Punjab. We have regularly encouraged the use of maximum restraint and the need to respect human rights, most recently on 11 December.

Up-to-date official figures for deaths and detentions are not available. Estimates vary. We believe some 1,218 people have been killed by the security forces between January and November this year, and some 3,520 by terrorists.

Burma

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the Australian proposal for international economic sanctions against Burma/Myanmar's military regime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I assume that the hon. Lady is referring to United States congressional proposals. We are discussing these and other ideas for expressing our displeasure at the anti-democratic action of the Burmese military regime with our EC partners and other like-minded countries.

Thai-Burma Border

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the number of displaced people on the Thai-Burma border; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The latest border population figures are 44,539 persons on 1 November 1990. These figures were provided by a group of non-government organisations providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons on the Thai-Burmese border, at the request of the Thai Government.

Pakistan

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the printed testimony given to the hearing of the House Foreign Affairs sub-committee on Asian and Pacific affairs of the United States Congress on 2 October, concerning the present status of Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The official record of the hearing to which the hon. Gentleman refers will be available at the end of January 1991; this Department will then obtain a copy.

British Embassy, Kuwait

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will withdraw the remaining staff of the British embassy in Kuwait.

Mr. Hurd: Now that the overwhelming majority of the British community has been evacuated from Kuwait we have decided to withdraw our remaining embassy staff. We

have asked them to prepare to leave within the next week. Thereafter we shall no longer be able to provide assistance to any remaining British nationals. We therefore strongly urge them to leave Kuwait.

We continue to recognise the legitimate Government of Kuwait, who have been informed of our decision to withdraw the embassy staff. We utterly reject Iraq's illegal occupation and annexation of Kuwait.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Primary School Enrolments

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present trend in primary school enrolments; and what projections there are for primary school enrolments in each of the next five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Primary school enrolments have risen steadily over the past five years. Latest projections, however, indicate that there will be a slight decline over the next five years. The figures, at January each year, are as follows:

	Actual total enrolment
1986	181,087
1987	181,893
1988	182,499
1989	184,241
1990	185,767

	Projected enrolment
1991	185,590
1992	185,030
1993	185,410
1994	185,150
1995	184,280

Detention

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many arrests have been made under the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order since 1 January; how many persons have been detained for more than 24 hours under the said order; how many warrants of further detention have been issued under article 44 of the said order; and in how many cases access to legal advice has been delayed under article 59(8) of the said order.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows for the period 1 January 1990 to 31 October 1990:

	Number
Number of arrests under the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989	18,428
Number of persons detained for more than 24 hours under the Order	368
Number of warrants of further detention under Article 44 of the Order	14
Cases of delayed access to legal advice under Article 59(8) of the Order	21

AIDS

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have died from AIDS in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The number of persons with AIDS who are known to have died each year in Northern Ireland since 1985 is given in the table:

	Number
1985	1
1986	—
1987	1
1988	1
1989	7
1990	[1]8

[1] to 30 November

Nursery Education

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many, and what percentage of, pre-school children in Northern Ireland are enrolled in maintained, integrated and controlled nursery schools in Northern Ireland; and whether he proposes to fund an increase in nursery school provision.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

	January 1990
Maintained pupils	1,091
Percentage[1]	2·0
Integrated pupils	0
Percentage[1]	0
Controlled pupils	3,762
Percentage[1]	6·9
Total pupils	4,853
Percentage[1]	8·9

[1] The number of pupils as a percentage of the 3 and 4-year-old population.

Limited resources for school building have made it necessary to give priority to provision for children of compulsory school age. It has not therefore been possible to provide an expansion of nursery provision apart from some limited growth in north and west Belfast under the "Making Belfast Work" initiative. I can offer no immediate prospect of change.

European Community Funds

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much money has been expended in the Ballymoney borough council area out of the various EEC funds;

(2) how much money has been expended in the Moyle council area out of the various EEC funds;

(3) how much money has been expended in the Ballymena borough council area out of the various EEC funds.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are numerous sources of EC grant and while, in most cases, figures for the Province as

a whole are available they are not analysed on the basis sought by the hon. Gentleman. Consideration is, however, being given to how such information might be made available in relation to future payments from the EC structural funds.

ENERGY

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the quantities of *(a)* spent nuclear fuel, *(b)* cladding for spent nuclear fuel and *(c)* nuclear waste that have been imported into the United Kingdom for each year from 1970 to 1989 inclusive; if he will give projected levels of imports for each category for each year from 1990 to 2000 inclusive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British Nuclear Fuels plc and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority have imported some 4,000 tonnes of uranium as spent fuel since reprocessing began in the mid-1960s. They do not import nuclear waste, nor do they import cladding other than as part of the fuel. The projected levels are a commercial matter for the reprocessing companies.

Connection Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the 12 regional distribution companies about the future level of connection charges for new houses.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. It is for the Director General of Electricity Supply to adjudicate where disputes arise as to the reasonableness of connection costs.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what estimate he has made of the effects of the reported delays in the completion of the secondary safety computer system for the Sizewell B pressurised water reactor nuclear power station on *(a)* the non-fossil fuel obligation and *(b)* the external financing limit of Nuclear Electric;

(2) what discussions he has had with the chairman of Nuclear Electric concerning delays in completing the software for the operational secondary safety systems at the Sizewell B nuclear power station;

(3) what information he has received from the nuclear installations inspectorate about delays in the development of the operational secondary safety computer system for the Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The proposed protection system for Sizewell B consists of a computer-based primary protection system and a non-computer based secondary system. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate is satisfied with the progress being made in the development of both systems.

The construction of Sizewell B power station is a matter for Nuclear Electric plc. The company has informed me that the construction of the station is proceeding ahead of schedule.

"The Energy Alternative"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of "The Energy Alternative" by Walter C. Patterson published by Boxtree Books.

Mr. Moynihan: A copy of this book is already held in the Department's library.

Gas Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what fees have been paid to Touche Ross by way of *(a)* retainers and *(b)* specific services in connection with its duties as auditors to the flotation of British Gas in each year since its flotation; and what proportion of such payments is related to services provided in the detection of illegal multiple share applications;

(2) what fees he has paid to the National Westminster bank registrar's department by way of *(a)* retainers and *(b)* specific payments in conection with suspected illegal multiple share applications for British Gas in each year since its flotation.

Mr. Moynihan: The information requested is commercially confidential.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions since the flotation of British Gas in 1986, National Westminster bank registrar's department has provided services to his Department in respect of suspected illegal multiple share applications.

Mr. Moynihan: The registrars have been pleased to assist the police, the Department and the Crown prosecution service as necessary. It would involve disproportionate cost to establish the precise number of times on which assistance has been provided.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his total estimate of the total number of the individual applicants for shares in each of the 12 regional electricity companies grouped by head of household jointly with spouse and dependent children and other resident dependent relatives.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, when he expects to be in a position to provide statistics for the numbers of shareholders resident within the franchise area of each regional electricity company and the percentage of the total share capital owned by them.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We made available 54·6 per cent. of the total share capital in each company to the United Kingdom public. Of this, the percentages allocated to employees and preferential customers applying on priority forms are set out in the table. Applications received from customers, other than on priority application forms, cannot be separately identified and are therefore not included in the figures.

	Number of customer and employee priority applications '000s	Percentage of shares available to the public allocated to customers and employees
Eastern Electricity	603	53·4
East Midlands Electricity	303	37·5
London Electricity	289	36·0
Manweb	187	52·0
Midland Electricity	308	45·6
Northern Electric	165	53·3
Norweb	306	49·9
Seeboard	389	58·9
Southern Electric	472	48·4
South Wales Electricity	109	47·6
South Western Electricity	227	57·5
Yorkshire Electricity	256	42·0

Subsidence (Compensation)

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive British Coal's annual report on the administration of the subsidence compensation scheme for 1989-90.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have now received this report from British Coal and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Detection

14. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to improve the crime detection rate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The crime detection rate for the most serious offences, including violence against the person and sexual offences, remains high, at around 75 per cent. I shall continue to encourage chief officers to target their resources on serious and other crimes of particular concern to the public, although they must decide their own priorities and methods in the light of local circumstances. The police also need the help of the community to reduce the opportunities for crime, and I shall continue to encourage public involvement in crime prevention.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the clear-up rates of all crimes, violent crimes and homicides were in the Holmfirth and Huddersfield police districts for each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The information collected centrally relates to police force areas and is published annually; for 1989, in tables 2.19, 2.20 and 2.21 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales"—Cm 1322. More detailed statistics relating to Holmfirth and Huddersfield are contained in the annual report of the chief constable for West Yorkshire. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Remand Prisoners

17. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give, for the last date figures are available, the number of remand prisoners held in police cells in Greater Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yesterday there were 283 prisoners in cells of the Greater Manchester police. Of these, 73 were convicted and 210 were unconvicted.

Sunday Trading

19. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform the law on Sunday trading in those areas where there is common agreement among all interested parties.

Mrs. Rumbold: Although there is agreement in principle between the interested parties in a few specific areas, there is still no agreement on specific proposals; and on Sunday trading as a whole, wide divisions of opinion remain.

Prison System

21. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the British prison system over the next five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The current medium-term plans of the prison service for England and Wales are to reduce overcrowding by bringing the average number of prison places into line with the average prison population, and by using all accommodation to its proper extent; to seek to ensure all cells have integral sanitation or access to night sanitation; to extend regime opportunities by increasing hours of prisoner occupation, education and association; and to complete and consolidate improvements in management and staff performance. These plans are kept under review and are formally re-examined annually.

Plans for the prison services in Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Football Ticket Touts

22. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to extend the proposed legislation outlawing ticket touting at football matches to other sporting events.

Mr. John Patten: No. We agree with Lord Justice Taylor that the considerations are different. Touting at football matches creates public order problems because it encourages supporters without tickets to attend games, often leading to obstruction and disorder, and it undermines the segregation of supporters of different teams. Touting elsewhere may be offensive, but is not a serious threat to public order.

Crime Prevention

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss crime prevention initiatives.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the Association of Chief Police Officers' representatives shortly and expects to discuss a wide range of issues with them, including the fight against crime.

Charity Legislation

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had concerning the Woodfield report on charity legislation.

Mr. John Patten: A wide range of charities and other interested bodies and individuals made helpful comments on the Woodfield report. The Government took account of those comments when preparing last year's White Paper on charities and will, of course, give further attention to them when preparing legislation.

Drinking Clubs

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to review the laws appertaining to illegal drinking establishments with a view to granting confiscatory powers for properties and moneys and increasing penalties for those found guilty.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to review the penalties for selling liquor without a licence. Recent sentencing practice suggests that the current maximum penalty of a level 4 fine, which the Criminal Justice Bill will increase from £1,000 to £2,500, and six months' imprisonment adequately reflect the seriousness of the offence. There is already a power to order the forfeiture of property used in the commission of such an offence and to disqualify the offender from holding a licence upon a second or subsequent conviction.

Missing Persons

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide funds to the police for the purchase of a computer that can age people's photographs and thus help identify someone who has been missing for several years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The provision of equipment for individual police forces is a matter for police authorities. The E-Fit computer system, which was developed by the Home Office, enables a skilled operator to change the appearance of both facial composites and original photographs. The Home Office is currently considering the production of a guide to assist police officers in the use of E-Fit to age faces.

Lorrain Osman

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the Brixton remand prisoner Mr. Lorrain Osman; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Mr. Osman is not a remand prisoner. He was committed to custody on 1 June 1987 to await his return to Hong Kong. The case remains unresolved because of the series of appeals which Mr. Osman has initiated against his extradition. A fugitive cannot be surrendered while proceedings on an appeal in this country are pending.

Since November, the Home Office has received about 20 letters relating to the case.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On 5 December 1990 the Home Office had 45,766 permanent staff. Occupational health services for these staff are provided, on a payment basis, by the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals —doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers—in a network of regional offices.

Police Forces

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the size of the police force, both uniformed and civilian staff, in the Holmfirth and Huddersfield police districts in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The tables show the police strength in Holmfirth and Huddersfield for December 1979 and November 1990.

Holmfield Sub-division[1]

	Strength	
	Police	*Civilian*
1979 (December)	92	8
1990 (November)	103	23

Huddersfield Sub-division[1]

	Strength	
	Police	*Civilian*
1979 (December)	293	96
1990 (November)	284	102

[1]The boundaries of both sub-divisions have changed since 1979 and therefore the manpower figures are not directly comparable.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to *(a)* the report of Mr. Geoffrey Dear, inspector of constabulary for the midlands, on the state of Derbyshire police and *(b)* the extent to which the efficiency of the force has been influenced by controls imposed by Derbyshire county council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on 5 December 1990 at columns *117-18*.

Wormhoudt Massacre

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received a report from the German prosecutor following the interviews with survivors of the Wormhoudt massacre on 5 October 1989 and other statements provided on 20 June.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has not received a report from the German prosecutor, but the German Ministry of Justice has undertaken to keep the British Government informed of the prosecutor's eventual decision.

Broadcasting

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last year the broadcasting unit of his Department has made contact with *(a)* the BBC and *(b)* the IBA; and what subjects were raised.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Officials from the broadcasting department of the Home Office have been in touch with the BBC and the IBA regularly throughout the year. A wide range of broadcasting subjects were discussed, including matters connected with the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Vietnamese Boat People

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will offer to allow the 111 Vietnamese boat people whose boat was destroyed by the Hong Kong authorities to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have agreed to resettle a further 2,000 Vietnamese refugees over the three years to June 1992. We will be happy to consider the cases of any of the 111 who meet the criteria for selection to come to the United Kingdom under this programme.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to send to all recipients of mobility allowance over 18 years of age a reminder that they are eligible for a proxy or postal vote at elections without the need of supporting signatures of qualified persons.

Mrs. Rumbold: We are not aware that there is a general lack of knowledge among electors who receive a mobility allowance about their absent voting rights. However, we are considering ways in which the provisions allowing an absent vote both for an indefinite period and at a particular election might be made more widely known.

Racism

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to strengthen the legislation against racist literature.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Public Order Act 1986 strengthened the relevant legislation. We have no current plans for further amendment to it.

LSD and Strychnine

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department and the police are taking to discover the source of self-adhesive stickers laced with LSD and strychnine which are being offered to children; and whether anybody has yet been apprehended for offering these substances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the national drugs intelligence unit and the police that they have not been able to find any evidence whatsoever to support claims that such stickers exist. In the absence of such evidence, the police here and in other countries believe that circular letters claiming that such stickers are being offered to children are a hoax, although they remain ready to examine any evidence which is put to them.

Channel 3

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department intends to abandon the contiguity rule when implementing the ownership restrictions relating to Channel 3 franchises under schedule 2 of the Broadcasting Act.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I made clear in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 4 December at columns *85-87*, we intend, through the supplementary ownership rules, to allow one body to hold a controlling interest in two regional Channel 3 licences as long as they are not both large, and for this purpose nine of the 15 licence areas will be designated as large. When we originally announced our proposals on ownership of Channel 3 licences we envisaged designating only five or six licence areas as large, but providing in addition that co-ownership of contiguous areas would not be permitted. We believe on further consideration that a contiguity rule could give rise to unintended problems and that the need for such a rule can in large part be met by designating a higher number of "large" areas as we propose.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the average length of time taken to determine applications for asylum made *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* at posts overseas.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Information is given in the following table.

Estimated average length of time between the receipt of an asylum application and the decision, for cases decided in the third quarter of 1990

	Months
(a) Applications made in the United Kingdom[1]	13·5
(b) Applications made at British posts overseas, and referred[2] to the Home Office for decision	14

[1] At ports or after entry.

[2] Excludes certain applications by nationals of Afghanistan and Somalia to the British High Commission in, respectively, New Delhi and Dhaka, which are being processed locally. Information on the average decision time for these cases is not currently available centrally.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each month since September 1989 to the nearest available date how many applications made within the United Kingdom for asylum were made (a) by applicants in the United Kingdom with leave, *(b)* by overstayers and *(c)* by alleged illegal entrants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* Information is given in the table. Reliable estimates of the status of applicants after May 1990 are not yet available.

Applications [1] [2] for asylum in the United Kingdom made after entry, by status of principal applicant September 1989 to May 1990

	1989				1990				
	September	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*
Status of principal applicant at time of application									
Within existing leave	535	610	420	515	600	410	440	500	475
Overstayers[3]	60	70	60	40	65	75	80	80	115
Illegal entrant	50	30	50	45	85	30	50	95	105
Information not available	80	90	50	75	150	170	185	65	80
Total	720	800	580	670	900	685	760	735	775

[1] Provisonal figures: those for 1990 may understate because of delays in recording. Figures rounded to nearest 5.
[2] Including dependants applying at the same time, or subsequently to date.
[3] Including those who were subject to deportation action as an overstayer or on other grounds.

Police Officers (Homicides)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many homicides of police officers have been reported in England and Wales since the passage of the Homicide Act 1957; and how many cases have resulted in conviction for murder.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* Information on the number of homicides of police officers is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales"—table 4.4*(a)* and 4.4*(b)* in the latest issue for 1989, Cm. 1322—copies of which are available in the Library.

During the period 1958-1989, there were 51 homicides of police officers reported in England and Wales. Of these, 27 resulted in conviction for murder.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Exports (Iraq)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications his Department has had with the firms, Walter Somers Ltd. and Sheffield Forgemasters Ltd., regarding the export of goods to Iraq.

Mr. Lilley: My Department has had three approaches from Walter Somers Ltd. and two letters from Forgemasters Engineering about equipment now known to be for the Iraqi long-range gun project.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to which overall contracts the gun components for Iraq were part of; and whether any such contracts were promoted by his Department through the British Overseas Trade Board export intelligence service.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Orders for components of the Iraqi long-range gun used the number of a genuine petrochemical project known as PC2. Genuine orders for project PC2 were promoted through the BOTB's export intelligence service, but none of the information passed related to the Iraqi gun project.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action was taken after the report of Walter Somers that it had been approached about aiming equipment in the Iraqi supergun order.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Walter Somers was advised that an export licence would not be granted for such equipment. No further action was taken in the absence of a connection between this and any other orders.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the day on which it was made known to his Department that Dr. Gerald Bull had conceived plans involving piping for a gun or launcher.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Evidence began to accumulate on this in late 1989.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specifications of the Iraqi supergun export order were given to his Department.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Certain descriptions and drawings of materials now known to relate to the Iraqi long-range gun were passed to the Department by Walter Somers and Sheffield Forgemasters in 1988.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any inquiries were made to the Export Credits Guarantee Department in respect of the Iraqi gun export order.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose details of commercial relations between ECGD and its customers.

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the specifications of the Iraqi export order supergun were first available to his Department.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* No full specification of the supergun as a whole has ever been passed to this Department.

Export Controls

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are taken by his Department to ascertain the accuracy of the information that is supplied by those firms seeking licences to export goods under the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1987.

Mr. Lilley: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on 29 November, column 1060.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the proper functioning of his Department's procedures for scrutinising licence applications under the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1987.

Mr. Lilley: The administration of export licensing by my Department was throroughly reviewed in 1988 and the controls are kept under continuous review to ensure that they remain effective and are efficiently administered.

Technology (Imports and Exports)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out the occasions since 1979 when he has used the provisions of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 to prohibit the export of sensitive technologies or materials relating to United Kingdom commitments to *(a)* the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, *(b)* COCOM controls and *(c)* the missile technology control regime; and what goods have been subject to forfeit under these provisions over the same time period.

Mr. Lilley: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pakistan (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he possesses in regard to attempts by Pakistan between February and April 1990 to purchase advanced high-temperature furnaces capable of assisting in the production of nuclear weapons from the Consarc Company and Torval Ltd., based in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: It is not the practice to discuss individual export control matters.

Defence Equipment Licensing

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what category of licences are included in the figures for export licences granted for the sale of defence equipment in 1988 and 1989 as listed in his answer of 15 October, *Official Report*, column *685*, which are not included in his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *792*, to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* Licences for personal firearms and shotguns are included in the figures supplied in the answer of 15 October. These licences were not included in the answer of 21 February which dealt specifically with military equipment.

SCOTLAND

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department; and *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Lang: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the civil service occupational health service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom.

At 1 December 1990 13,268 staff were employed in the Scottish Office, Scottish prison service, the Registers of Scotland executive agency and the three minor departments (Scottish Record Office, General Register Office for Scotland, and the Scottish Courts Administration) for which I am responsible.

Firearms (Visitors' Permits)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications have been dealt with for British visitors' permits under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 in respect of each police authority in Scotland for the most recent period of 12 months in respect of which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For the 12-month period from 1 October 1989, when the permit scheme was introduced, the information is as follows:

Police Force	*Firearm*	*Shotgun*
Central	19	56
Dumfries and Galloway	401	161
Fife	27	73
Grampian	397	806
Lothian and Borders	174	566
Northern	1,379	1,117
Strathclyde	823	387
Tayside	457	2,374
Total for Scotland	3,677	5,540

Non-pasteurised Milk

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of the health implications of the consumption of non-pasteurised milk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Retail sales of unpasteurised milk have been banned in Scotland since the introduction in 1983 of compulsory pasteurisation. This was in response to widespread public concern about the risks associated with untreated milk following a number of serious outbreaks of milk-borne disease in Scotland. There are no proposals to change the Government's compulsory pasteurisation policy, which has led to the virtual eradication of milk-borne disease in Scotland.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding incidents of illness or disease in Scotland in the last 10 years which can be attributed to the consumption of non-pasteurised milk.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of reported cases of food poisoning associated with the consumption of untreated cows' milk for each year since 1980 are as follows:

	Number of outbreaks	*Number of individual cases*
1980	5	103
1981	8	782
1982	14	539
1983	7	29
1984	5	27
1985	8	74
1986	2	10
1987	5	30
1988	2	5
1989	—	—

Alcohol Abuse

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects and centres to which to the Scottish Office has contributed financially in respect of

research into alcohol abuse and or misuse, with the figure for each such project or centre for projects to tackle alcohol abuse and misuse.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 11 December 1990, column *373*.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reports the Lord Advocate has sought or received on the sinking of the Antares; what action he is considering; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The procurator fiscal at Kilmarnock is investigating the circumstances of the loss of this vessel and the deaths of the crew and will report to Crown counsel.

Designated Places

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the designated places set up in each of the past 10 years and those planned for the next two years; and what financial assistance was given and is to be provided for the setting up and running of these places.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Albyn house in Aberdeen is at present the only location designated by the Secretary of State in terms of section 5 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980. It opened in 1983 and received £150,000 capital and £408,000 revenue funding, over four years, from the Scottish Office. A designated place is under construction in Inverness and is planned to open next April. It will receive up to £150,000 capital grant this financial year and tapering revenue grant towards its running costs over the next three years. The amount of revenue grant for 1991-92 is under consideration.

Requests for grant under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 have been submitted to the Scottish Office for designated places in Port Glasgow and in the city of Glasgow, both with the aim of opening in 1992-93. These are being considered and decisions will be announced early next year. Scottish Office financial assistance depends on the nature of the applications received and on competing demands on available resources.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now announce the budget and members of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: In view of the importance which I attach to nature conservation in Scotland, I have decided that the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland should be launched next year with a budget of £19 million. This is over 40 per cent. of the NCC budget of £45 million for the whole of Great Britain this year. This will not only allow the existing work to continue, but will provide scope for new initiatives such as a scientific programme relevant to conservation management, delegation of decision-making to the local level, practical conservation projects and more user-friendly procedures.

The Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland represents a major Government initiative for nature conservation in Scotland. Building on the work of the existing council, we now have all the right ingredients to bring our initiative to fruition. The combination of Magnus Magnusson's dedicated and positive leadership, an experienced and expert council and a budget allowing it to embark on new tasks will give the body the best possible start.

In addition to Magnus Magnusson as chairman I have appointed the following:

Mr. Bruce Cowe
The Earl of Dalkeith
Professor George M. Dunnet
Mr. David Laird
Sir John Lister-Kaye
Councillor Duncan McPherson
Professor Alasdair McIntyre
Dr. Patricia Monaghan
Dr. William Mutch
Professor Christopher Smout
Professor David Sugden

My appointments to the council represent a wide variety of interests. There are scientists of international repute engaged in research on conservation issues, those with land management experience who have a vital practical role to play, and others involved with the voluntary conservation movement. I am sure that this strong team under the leadership of Magnus Magnusson will improve understanding and foster a creative relationship with those involved in the management of Scotland's natural resources.

The new agency and the Countryside Commission for Scotland, to which I have also given additional funding, will provide a sound foundation for the creation of Scottish Natural Heritage. I am particularly keen to promote the integration of the two bodies and I know that Magnus Magnusson as its chairman-designate, as well as Bruce Cowe and Bill Mutch who are members of both boards, and the other members and staff of both bodies will carry forward the merger with enthusiasm.

RENAVAL Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of the European Community's RENAVAL programme in Inverclyde and Glasgow.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* On 31 July the Commission announced that the travel-to-work areas of Greenock and Glasgow had been declared eligible under the RENAVAL Community programme. A programme of measures is being prepared at present and will be submitted shortly to the Commission for approval.

Disabled People

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of disabled people in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole who could benefit from the sheltered placement scheme; and how many such persons are now so placed in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* I estimate the number of disabled people who could benefit from the sheltered placement scheme to be around 10 per cent. of those registered as disabled. At April 1990 there

were around 34,000 registered disabled people in Scotland as a whole, of which about 15,700 were resident in Strathclyde. At October 1990 there were 218 such persons employed under the sheltered placement scheme in Strathclyde and 683 people employed through the scheme in Scotland as a whole.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People (Anti-discrimination Legislation)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions his Department has had with disability organisations regarding the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation.

Mr. Jackson: Ministers and officials from this Department have regular discussions with disability organisations during which the subject of anti-discrimination legislation is sometimes raised.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Medical Research Council

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many administrative staff are employed by the Medical Research Council at its London headquarters; and what is the cost in absolute terms and as a percentage of its total budget.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand that as of 10 December 1990 the MRC is employing 343 administrative staff at its London headquarters office. In the 1989-90 financial year its full running costs were £8·7 million—4·7 per cent. of the council's overall budget.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to finalise the draft circular on staffing for pupils with special educational needs which was issued for consultation in January.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department has today published circular 11/90 on staffing for pupils with special educational needs and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Primary Schools

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the Audit Commission's report on rationalising primary school provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and I welcome the publication of the Audit Commission's report on rationalising primary school provision. The Government will continue to urge LEAs to remove surplus school places. Despite significant progress in some areas, there are still too many, as this study shows.

The Audit Commission's report indicates that about 900,000, or roughly one fifth, of all primary school places in England and Wales are surplus to requirements. The commission points out that surplus capacity involves expenditure which could be more productively used to improve the quality of education. Its report calls on LEAs to tackle this issue by reviewing their position and by initiating local discussion of proposals for change. The commission notes that education in small primary schools is significantly more expensive per pupil; and its report indicates that unit costs tend to rise steeply when numbers fall below 80 or 90 pupils. It recommends that these costs are taken into account alongside other factors when LEAs review the pattern of provision.

It is not possible to eliminate all surplus places and the Government recognise that there are circumstances in which it is neither practical nor desirable to close small schools. But the Audit Commission clearly demonstrates the benefits which can accrue from a more efficient pattern of primary education and the Government share its view that parents and others should be given more opportunity to assess the case for change. We look to LEAs to make the necessary statutory proposals.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Young People (Benefits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost, in 1991-92, of raising income support, community charge benefit and housing benefit personal allowances for people under 25 years to the level for those aged 25 years and over.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available, but I shall write to the hon. Member when it is.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons aged 16 and 17 years are disqualified from benefit *(a)* for not taking a YTS place, *(b)* because they are homeless, and *(c)* by any other category in (i) 1988, (ii) 1989 and (iii) at the latest available date.

Miss Widdecombe: Information in the form requested is not available. However, in 1988 there were 3,881 disqualifications from unemployment benefit in Great Britain because a person either voluntarily left a YTS place without good cause, lost a place through misconduct, refused without good cause to apply for or to accept a place or neglected to avail himself of a reasonable opportunity of a place. In 1989, there were 863 such disqualifications. In 1990, up to September 1990, there have been 585 such disqualifications. Placements on YTS or YT schemes are not limited to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Homelessness is not a ground for refusal of benefit.

The number of applications for income support refused under the "severe hardship" provisions applying to 16 and 17-year-olds since September 1988 are:

	Number
1988	773
1989	6,164
[1]1990	7,377

[1] To end of November.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he made to recommendations from the European Commission concerning travel concession cards for over-60s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The proposed European Commission over-60s card is intended to establish that a person over 60 has the opportunity to take advantage of a wide range of existing concessions throughout the Community, including transport. We are continuing to study the implications for the United Kingdom and will respond to the Commission in due course.

Benefit Values

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 21 November, *Official Report*, column *132*, if he will give the current monetary value or range of monetary values of each benefit, together with the date of the last adjustment in each such level of benefit and the previous monetary value or range of monetary values of each such benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the table at columns *849-58*, on 25 October 1989 which gives, in most cases, the present rate of each benefit and its value immediately prior to the last adjustment, which for the majority of benefits was 9 April 1990. Information on those benefits which were not increased on this date, or where the value has changed subsequently, is given in the table.

Benefit	*Value* £	*Last adjustment* *Date*	*Prior value* £
Child benefit	7·25	April 1987	7·10
Christmas bonus	10·00	Unadjusted since inception	
Income support			
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in			
Residential care homes			
Old age	155·00	August 1990	150·00
very dependent elderly	170·00	August 1990	165·00
mental disorder (not handicap)	155·00	August 1990	150·00
drug/alcohol dependence	155·00	August 1990	150·00
mental handicap	180·00	August 1990	175·00
physical disablement			
(a) (under pension age)	215·00	August 1990	210·00
(b) (over pension age)	155·00	August 1990	150·00
others	155·00	August 1990	150·00
maximum Greater London increase	23·00	April 1989	17·50
Nursing homes			
mental disorder (not handicap)	210·00	August 1990	200·00
drug/alcohol dependence	210·00	August 1990	200·00
mental handicap	225·00	August 1990	215·00
terminal illness	260·00	August 1990	245·00
physical disablement			
(a) (under pension age)	255·00	August 1990	245·00
(b) (over pension age)	210·00	August 1990	200·00
others (including elderly)	210·00	August 1990	200·00
maximum Greater London increase	23·00	April 1989	17·50
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (daily rate)			
breakfast	1·10	Unadjusted since inception	
midday meal	1·55	Unadjusted since inception	
evening meal	1·55	Unadjusted since inception	
The Polish home Ilford Park maximum amount for accommodation and meals	155·00	August 1990	150·00
Retirement pension			
Age addition	0·25	Unadjusted since inception	
Widow's payment	1,000·00	Unadjusted since inception	

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the monetary level, or range of monetary levels, for invalidity benefit when it was introduced in September 1971, together with equivalent details and dates for each subsequent change in benefit levels, showing the average number of people in receipt of such benefit levels at each of its stages.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is as follows. Information on standard weekly rates of invalidity pension, invalidity allowance and average numbers receiving benefit is in table A. The maximum amounts of earnings-related additional pension payable with invalidity pension are in table B.

Table A

Date	Year	Standard weekly rates of invalidity pension: Personal benefit £	Increase for dependent: Adult £	Only, elder or eldest child £	Second child £	Standard weekly rates of invalidity allowance[2]: Each Other £	Higher rate £	Middle rate £	Lower rate £	Estimated average numbers receiving benefit: Thousands (000)
23 September	1971	6·00	3·70	2·95	2·05	1·95	1·00	0·60	0·30	n.a.
5 October	1972	6·75	4·15	3·30	2·40	2·30	1·15	0·70	0·35	430
4 October	1973	7·75	4·75	3·80	2·90	2·80	1·60	1·00	0·50	440
25 July	1974	10·00	6·00	4·90	4·00	3·90	2·05	1·30	0·65	450
10 April	1975	11·60	6·90	5·65	4·15	4·15	2·40	1·50	0·75	470
20 November	1975	13·30	7·90	6·50	5·00	5·00	2·80	1·70	0·85	470
18 November	1976	15·30	9·20	7·45	5·95	5·95	3·20	2·00	1·00	510
4 April	1977	15·30	9·20	[1]6·45	5·95	5·95	3·20	2·00	1·00	550
17 November	1977	17·50	10·50	7·40	6·90	6·90	3·70	2·30	1·15	550
3 April	1978	17·50	10·50	6·10	6·10	6·10	3·70	2·30	1·15	600
16 November	1978	19·50	11·70	6·35	6·35	6·35	4·15	2·60	1·30	600
2 April	1979	19·50	11·70	[1]5·35	[1]5·35	[1]5·35	4·15	2·60	1·30	620
15 November	1979	23·30	14·00	7·10	7·10	7·10	4·90	3·10	1·55	620
27 November	1980	26·00	15·60	7·50	7·50	7·50	5·45	3·45	1·75	620
26 November	1981	28·35	17·00	7·70	7·70	7·70	6·20	4·00	2·00	660
25 November	1982	31·45	18·85	7·95	7·95	7·95	6·90	4·40	2·20	700
24 November	1983	32·60	19·55	7·60	7·60	7·60	7·15	4·80	2·30	760
29 November	1984	34·25	20·55	7·65	7·65	7·65	7·50	4·80	2·40	825
28 November	1985	38·30	23·00	8·05	8·05	8·05	8·05	5·10	2·55	865
31 July	1986	38·70	23·25	8·05	8·05	8·05	8·15	5·20	2·60	935
9 April	1987	39·50	23·75	8·05	8·05	8·05	8·30	5·30	2·65	1,010
14 April	1988	41·15	24·75	8·40	8·40	8·40	8·65	5·50	2·75	1,100
13 April	1989	43·60	26·20	8·95	8·95	8·95	9·20	5·80	2·90	1,185
9 April	1990	46·90	28·20	9·65	9·65	9·65	10·00	6·20	3·10	1,265

[1] Adjusted to take account of child benefit.
[2] Invalidity allowance is payable with invalidity pension and the rates depend on age when incapacity began.

Table B
Maximum amount of additional invalidity pension

Date	£
6 April 1979	1·31
12 November 1979	1·54
6 April 1980	2·96
24 November 1980	3·45
6 April 1981	5·37
23 November 1981	5·86
6 April 1982	8·64
22 November 1982	9·59
6 April 1983	11·96
21 November 1983	12·40
6 April 1984	15·42
26 November 1984	16·21
6 April 1985	19·50
25 November 1985	20·87
6 April 1986	23·77
28 July 1986	24·03
6 April 1987	29·11
6 April 1988	34·75
6 April 1989	41·34

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have claimed mobility allowance on the grounds that they are both deaf and blind at the last date for which figures are available; how many of these claims were *(a)* successful, *(b)* refused and *(c)* awaiting adjudication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) of 11 December at column *424*.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of enabling people who qualify only for a care component of the disability living allowance before the age of 65 years to receive a mobility component if their mobility needs increase after that age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* The extent to which people qualifying for a care component before age 65 would be likely to become entitled to a mobility component after reaching age 65 cannot be predicted with any certainty. It is estimated, however, that the eventual cost could be in the order of £100 million a year.

DEFENCE

Fire Fighting

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Royal Air Force practice with regard to charging local authorities for airlifting fire crews to fight fires on islands; and whether any standing arrangements exist with individual fire authorities to make helicopters available for this purpose.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Where military search and rescue SAR helicopters fly to islands to rescue people from life-threatening fires, local authorities are not charged for airlifting fire crews at the same time. Where life is not in danger, however, and SAR helicopters would not otherwise have attended the incident, appropriate charges

are raised. There are currently standing arrangements with the local authorities of Devon, Cornwall and the Highlands and Islands covering such assistance.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had or is having with *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* the French Governments regarding the loan of a ballistic missile submarine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been no such discussions.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for how long he intends that HMS Dreadnought should remain at Rosyth naval dockyard; (2) what is his present policy in respect of the disposal of the hulks of the reactor components of retired nuclear-powered submarines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The question of the disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines is under active consideration but no final decision has yet been taken. Meanwhile HMS Dreadnought will continue safely to be stored afloat at Rosyth royal dockyard.

Sexual Orientation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Royal Navy makes any payments to those giving information about service men's sexual orientation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Fishing Boats (Accidents)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail the arrangements he has agreed with the Clyde Fishermen's Association to avoid further accidents between fishing boats and submarines in the firth of Clyde; whether such arrangements will extend to the Irish sea and its approaches; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will extend the submarine notification procedure between the Royal Navy and the fishing industry for the firth of Clyde to the Irish sea.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information on the times and areas in which submarine activity is planned will be broadcast to fishermen by the coastguard every four hours using VHF radio. Similar information will also be available through the operations room at Faslane. The scheme will be introduced in the Clyde area on 17 December. Any extension of this scheme to other sea areas would have to take account both of its working in the Clyde area and of its practicability elsewhere.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the trials of the Seametrix system of transponders on fishing nets; when he expects them to conclude; if the cost of such systems will be funded by the Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Trials of a static electronic net-avoidance device have already been carried out. It is planned to hold a series of further trials, involving a towed prototype. These will begin on 13 December and will include the participation of Royal Navy vessels. No decision has been taken on the funding of such devices if and when a product becomes commercially available.

Tornado (Power Line Incident)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding an incident involving a Tornado cutting a power line near Carsphairn on 26 November; what information he now has about the incident; what action he is taking as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In addition to the hon. Member's letter of 29 November, we have received one other. A unit inquiry was held immediately after the incident, and confirmed that a Tornado GR1 aircraft struck a wire near Dalmellington at approximately 11.50 am on 26 November, while undertaking a properly authorised sortie in the Borders tactical training area. The aircrew were authorised to fly at a minimum separation distance of 100 ft above the ground or obstacles. The inquiry judged that the aircraft was 100 ft or more above the ground when it struck the wire. Following the inquiry, the aircrew were formally interviewed by higher authority before departing for operational duties in the Gulf.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the report of the naval inquiry into the sinking of the Antares.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The board of inquiry should complete its work later this week. The report will be forwarded to Ministers after it has been considered by the Commander-in-Chief.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), *Official Report*, 28 November, column *442*, he will set out for each of the nuclear tests listed the proportion of the cost of each test charged to the United Kingdom and the cost in 1990 in sterling of each test conducted; and which of the tests resulted in the venting of radioactive gases to the atmosphere.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to reveal financial information associated with United Kingdom participation in nuclear tests. Of the 14 tests listed in my answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 28 November at column *442*, there were operational releases of radioactive gases from three, namely Gibne, Armada and Barnwell. In none of these was any radioactivity detected at locations beyond the boundary of the Nevada test site.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has received any information from the French Defence Ministry concerning the nuclear test conducted by France at Muroroa on 21 November.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence has received no information direct from the French Ministry of Defence on this subject. However, I understand that the French Ministry of Defence issued a statement via Agence France Presse immediately after the test on 21 November.

WALES

Drugs

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department will take steps to ascertain whether any consultants employed in regional specialty units funded by his Department are prevented from presenting the drugs of their choice to patients because of financial constraints.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Except where central guidance may be issued, this is a matter for the appropriate managing health authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if regional specialty renal units in Wales may prescribe the drug Erythropoietin to any patient that the consultant considers appropriate without financial constraint.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under the new management and financial arrangements which will come into effect from 1 April 1991 it will be for individual health authorities to determine appropriate arrangements relating to the prescription of drugs. In the meantime, funds have been made available to those health authorities responsible for main renal units in Wales to assist with the additional cost of providing Erythropoietin where this is considered clinically necessary.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the proposed ministerial duties of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

Mr. David Hunt: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 6 December 1990.

Council Housing

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the systems used by local authorities in Wales in allocating council-owned properties to prospective tenants in respect of their even-handedness.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Advice to local housing authorities concerning the allocation of council houses was produced by the housing management advisory panel for Wales in February 1988, and issued from the Department with the endorsement of the then Committee of Welsh District Councils. If the hon. Gentleman has any suggestions for further advice I should be happy to consider them.

River Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the confirmed pollution incidents in Wales since the establishment of the Welsh region of the National Rivers Authority, specifying the nature and extent of the pollution, and indicating (i) whether a prosecution is pending, (ii) the number of prosecutions that have occurred, and (iii) the number of prosecutions that have been successful together with the penalties.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for the National Rivers Authority.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will express the amount of money allocated to each county in Wales to tackle alcohol abuse *(a)* as a figure per head in each county and *(b)* as a figure per head of those estimated as having alcohol problems in each county.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is not intended to allocate money from the central fund on a proportional basis to counties.

NHS Employees (Guidance)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has completed consideration of the case for further guidance to be issued to national health service employees on the private practice interests in potential competition with their work in income-generating departments in the national health service.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In conjunction with the Department of Health, work is proceeding on the preparation of guidance dealing with staff-employer relationships in the NHS, including conflicts of interests.

Crown Buildings

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes there have been in the place of work of sub-divisions of his Department as between different Crown buildings *(a)* in the present financial year and *(b)* in 1988-89.

Mr. David Hunt: The only significant changes took place in 1989-90 when the agriculture department's office in Aberystwyth was moved and the staff transferred to offices at Trawsgoed, and in 1990-91 when the Welsh Office education department moved from Cathays Park to Llanishen, Cardiff.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for changing the place of work of sub-divisions of his Department between different Crown buildings *(a)* in the current financial year, *(b)* in the coming financial year and *(c)* subsequent to the departure of the Exports Credits Guarantee Department Insurance Services Group from Crown building, Cathays Park.

Mr. David Hunt: There are currently no firm plans to change the location of Welsh Office divisions. My Department's accommodation needs are however kept under constant review; if additional accommodation becomes available in the New Crown building, Cathays Park, that will be taken into account.

NHS Information Systems

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, what is the additional *(a)* capital cost, *(b)* staffing revenue costs and *(c)* non-staff revenue costs associated with the establishment of improved information systems and detailed costing of services in the current and next financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Developments to improve information systems generally, including the costing of services, are being undertaken as part of the all-Wales information and information technology strategy for the

NHS in Wales. The total available funds provided by the Department in 1990-91 to support the strategy are £12·2 million capital, and an additional £3·36 million revenue. A precise division between staffing and non-staff revenue costs is not readily available. The funding for 1991-92 will be announced in the new year.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, what is his best estimate of the present degree of accuracy of the costing of different treatments by the national health service service providers in Wales; and what he expects it to be after the improved information systems are in place.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: National health service service providers do not at present have the computerised information systems to cost services at sub-speciality level as a matter of routine. The implementation of improved information systems over the next two to three years, and in particular the case mix management and new financial ledger systems, will give NHS providers increasingly detailed information at patient level which will enable them to utilise their resources with increased efficiency to provide a better quality service to patients.

Building Works

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), what factors led to the increase from £299,405 in 1988-89 to £686,144 in his Department's expenditure on building repairs, maintenance and improvements.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department's normal programme of repairs, maintenance and improvements was augmented by three major schemes:

the refurbishment of offices at Llanishen, Cardiff, for staff who were moved to release space in Cathays Park for extra staff working on the implementation of the NHS review;
the rationalisation of accommodation at Gabalfa, Cardiff for veterinary advisers and ADAS; and
the conversion of premises to workshops and storage space at the Colchester Avenue industrial estate, Cardiff.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), what is the breakdown between *(a)* Crown building, Cathays Park, *(b)* Gwydyr house, Whitehall, *(c)* Ty Glas road, Llanishen and *(d)* other in the 1988-89 and 1989-90 total of departmental expenditure on building repairs, maintenance and improvements.

Mr. David Hunt: Expenditure incurred by my Department on building repairs, maintenance and improvements was as follows:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £
Cathays Park	77,542	115,312
Gwydyr House	5,077	11,734
Llanishen	3,219	272,024
Other	213,567	287,074
	299,405	686,144

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), *Official Report*, column *151*, what is his estimate of expenditure on building repairs, maintenance and improvements in *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92; and if he will list the major jobs being carried out or proposed to be carried out in that period.

Mr. David Hunt: The forecast outturn of my Department's expenditure on building repairs, maintenance and improvements in 1990-91 is £510,000. Plans for 1991-92 are not yet firm, but expenditure is likely to be of the same order. Major works have been or will be completed in the following buildings in 1990-91:

Agriculture Department, Caernarfon;
Education Department, Bangor;
Medical Examination Centre, Port Talbot;
Agriculture Department, Trawsgoed;
Transport and Highways Department, Llanishen;
Old Crown Building, Cathays Park.

It is hoped to undertake major works at the following buildings in 1991-92:

Medical Examination Centre, Pontypridd;
Agriculture Department, Caernarfon;
Agriculture Department, Haverfordwest;
Agriculture Department, Gabalfa;
Staff Training Unit, Cardiff.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 December 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

County Courts

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General how he intends to consult Parliament about changes in county court procedure for rent arrears and possession actions.

The Attorney-General: The proposed changes in procedure follow recommendations of the civil justice review, which was presented to Parliament in June 1988. The Lord Chancellor announced his acceptance of them in April 1989. Public consultation on the proposed new rent action took place from the end of September to 19 November 1990. The Government are now considering how to proceed in the light of responses. Reforms to the existing procedure in possession cases are planned for July 1992, and the Lord Chancellor will be issuing a consultation paper on the proposed new rules.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates have been made of the amount of aid needed for reconstruction in South Africa, once apartheid has been dismantled, and in Mozambique and Angola, once peace is achieved.

Mrs. Chalker: It is too early to assess how much aid will be needed for these purposes. Britain remains committed to the creation of a prosperous and just southern Africa. This commitment underlies our current involvement in the region, and will continue to do so as appropriate and as circumstances change.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the size and purpose of *(a)* British and *(b)* EC aid for black South Africans.

Mrs. Chalker: The purpose of the British aid programme is to encourage the process of change in South Africa and to help black South Africans improve their abilities to play their rightful role in Government and economic and social development. In 1990-91 we expect to spend around £8 million from the bilateral programme, a figure that is set to rise in the years ahead.

The European Community aims to assist those disadvantaged by apartheid through projects which promote non-racialism, encourage democratic practices, and enjoy community support; and through non-violent organisations working for peaceful change. The European Community's South African programme amounts to the equivalent of approximately £20 million in 1990, of which our share will be about £4 million.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of all aid committed to the countries of Southern Africa and to SADCC in 1989 and 1990, stating the purpose of each allocation.

Mrs. Chalker: British bilateral aid commitments for the countries of southern Africa and SADCC cover a wide range of development activities, for expenditure in 1989 and 1990 and, in a number of cases, for the years beyond. They range from formal obligations to capital projects both large, such as the rehabilitation of Limpopo railway, and small, expenditure on which often stretches over several years, to technical co-operation where we are committed to the provision of expatriate expertise and training for local officers. The numbers of technical co-operation officers and trainees from the region both run into hundreds.

The most prominent commitments we have are for the SADCC projects and for the provision of programme aid in particular countries. Our commitment to SADCC amounts in total to £70 million, of which £10 million was pledged in 1990 and £15 million was committed in 1989 to finance the second phase of the Limpopo railway project. Programme aid pledges in 1989 and 1990, taken together, were made for Malawi (£10·5 million); Mozambique (£10 million); Tanzania (£17·5 million); and Zambia (£30 million).

In addition, Britain has pledged £10 million for Namibia, for commitment over three years from 1990, and an extra £10 million for our aid programme for black South Africans, for expenditure over four years. A pledge of £10 million was made to Zimbabwe in 1989, again for expenditure over a number of years.

Details of actual expenditure in 1989 can be obtained from "British Aid Statistics".

Pachamama Society

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the meeting between an official of his Department and Mr. Keochlin and Miss Sandys of Pachamama.

Mrs. Chalker: Mr. Keochlin and Miss Sandys of the Pachamama Society of Peru visited my Department on 28 November and provided information on the objectives and organisation of the society to one of my officials. There was a discussion of the United Kingdom's bilateral aid programme to Peru and in Latin America in general, with particular emphasis on environmental matters.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Inspectorate of Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated annual cost of Her Majesty's inspectorate of education in England.

Mr. Eggar: The estimated net recurrent cost of Her Majesty's inspectorate of education in England in 1990-91 is £28·1 million.

Books

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of books procured for university libraries and polytechnics libraries in 1970, 1980 and 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not collected centrally. Book and other purchases are for individual institutions to determine within their total resources.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the provision of Government funding for books at universities and polytechnics in 1979 and 1989, respectively *(a)* overall, at constant prices and *(b)* per student, at constant prices; and what has been the average increase in the cost of such text books in this period.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The higher education funding councils do not reserve part of their funding for book provision. It is for individual institutions to determine their expenditure within the total resources at their disposal.

Student Loans

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total take-up of student loans over the past 12 months; and if he will list the take-up of individual loans as a percentage of student funding in each university and polytechnic.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As at 12 December 1990, over 66,000 students had applied for loans, representing 10·5 per cent. of the estimated number of eligible students in the United Kingdom.

Figures showing the take-up of individual loans as a percentage of student funding in each university and polytechnic are not available. For a student who lives away from home, but not in London, and who receives the basic maintenance grant, the full-year loan facility in 1990-91 is nearly 16 per cent. of the total resources available from the uprated grant and the loan combined.

Science and Engineering Research Council

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many research grants will be funded in 1990-91 as a result of the Science and Engineering Research Council settlement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The total number of research grants being supported by the Science and Engineering Research Council in December 1990 was 5,019.

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many universities and polytechnics are known to his Department to have cash flow problems; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement on the practice of funds being made available three months in arrears.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The management of cash flow is for individual universities, polytechnics and colleges. Detailed information is not collected centrally. Under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1990, local education authorities must pay termly instalments of tuition fees promptly. The funding councils aim to take the general incidence of fee and other income into account in determining the profiles for their monthly payments of grant.

Science Parks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much of the available EC money for science park development has been taken up by universities and polytechnics in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The development of science parks is not specifically funded through the EC framework programme and, to date, no funds have been made available for that purpose.

Hardship Funds

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many universities and polytechnics administer hardship funds; how much money has been paid out from these funds; and to what extent they are oversubscribed.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to access funds, which were introduced for the first time this academic year. All universities and polytechnics have had allocations from total Great Britain provision of £25 million. Detailed information about the operation of the scheme will not be available until after the end of the academic year.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what obligations the governors of schools which obtain grant-maintained status are under to honour the terms of existing dual-use agreements, in particular the obligation to reimburse a dual-use partner part of its capital investment in the event of the governors' serving notice to terminate the agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The education assets board is responsible for identifying the property rights and liabilities of the former maintaining LEA and the former governing body which transfer to the governing body of the grant-maintained school in accordance with section 74 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Schedule 10 to the 1988 Act provides for circumstances where the interests in property are shared between the grant-maintained school and either the local education authority or a third party. The obligations upon the partners in dual-use schemes depend upon the terms of the agreement between the parties.

School Premises

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he will take to ensure that the management of out-of-hours use of school premises does not discourage investment by third parties in dual-use projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: We are considering urgently the possibility of amending section 42 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 so as to resolve the potential problem to which the hon. Member refers. I have placed a copy in the Library of an official letter from the Department of Education and Science which has just been issued explaining the position.

Universities (Accounts)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many universities registered deficits on their last year's accounts; and will he list them and the sums involved.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Universities' financial years end on 31 July. Accounts for 1989-90 are now being received by the Universities Funding Council which will analyse them early in 1991.

Nursery Provision

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration has been given to the reduction of nursery provision for staff in universities and the obligation of institutions of higher education to make provision under the terms of equal opportunities legislation.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This is for university managements to determine.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that computer equipment in universities is replaced at a rate which maintains the credibility of courses.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This is a matter for individual universities, with the assistance of substantial public funds from the computer board for the universities and research councils and from the Universities Funding Council.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to alter the format of community charge bills as proposed by the southern regional council of the Association of District Councils.

Mr. Portillo: Draft regulations are being issued today to charging authorities on the form of the community charge bill for 1991-92. This will enable authorities to amend their computer programmes and arrange their printing requirements so that bills can be sent out in good time when charges have been set in March. A copy of the draft regulations have been placed in the Library. The form of the bill will be on the lines set out in the Department's letter to authorities of 6 November. I believe that this simpler bill will be more easily understood by charge payers.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will undertake a review of the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 as they relate to *(a)* local authority finance and *(b)* political restrictions;

(2) if he has any plans to exempt elderly people being cared for at home by friends or relatives from the poll tax for 1991-92;

(3) if he has any plans to exempt non-working partners from the poll tax for 1991-92;

(4) if he has any plans to end the 20 per cent. contribution rule applying to all poll tax payers whatever their income for 1991-92;

(5) if he has any plans to exempt *(a)* students and *(b)* student nurses from the poll tax for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *263*.

Occupational Health Service

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Heseltine: All civil service departments and agencies have access to the services of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals—doctors, nurses and hygiene and safety advisers. It operates via a network of regional offices throughout the United Kingdom and also provides on-site medical advice to Departments. My Department has some 7,000 employees.

Gravel Extraction

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates and circumstances in the last five years when an application for gravel extraction has been refused by his Department.

Sir George Young: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Planning appeals involving gravel extraction in which planning permission has not been granted
Parliamentary Question Number 05010/90/91

Local authority	*Decision date*	*Main issues*
1986		
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	11 June 1986	Mineral policy: Bad neighbour issues—dirt, dust etc. and noise
Devon County Council	5 September 1986	Policy on agricultural land: the effect on landscape: Dirt, dust etc.: Noise/disturbance: Water supply: Highway issues, safety/congestion etc.
Buckinghamshire County Council	10 September 1986	Minerals policy: Effect on landscape: Surface water drainage: Restoration and future use
North Bedfordshire	10 October 1986	Effect on surrounding area: Overlooking, privacy: Noise disturbance: Fulfilment of need for mineral
1987		
Greater London Council	6 February 1987	Minerals policy: Agricultural land policy: Dirt, dust etc.: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Essex County Council	31 March 1987	Minerals policy

Local authority	Decision date	Main issues
Essex County Council	6 April 1987	Effect on landscape: Noise/disturbance: Traffic, highway safety, congestion: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Shropshire County Council	12 June 1987	Minerals policy: Effect on landscape
Gloucestershire County Council	6 October 1987	Minerals policy
Dorset County Council (Enforcement notice appeal)	28 October 1987	Restoration and future use
Durham County Council (Planning Appeal and enforcement notice appeal	19 November 1987	Policy on countryside and coastal areas: Effect on landscape: Trees/ woodlands: Fulfilment of need for mineral: Restoration and future use
1988		
Nottinghamshire County Council	21 January 1988	Minerals policy: Noise/disturbance
Northamptonshire County Council	22 March 1988	Minerals policy
Shropshire County Council	8 November 1988	Effect on landscape: Dirt, dust etc.: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Shropshire County Council	12 December 1988	Noise/disturbance: Traffic, highway safety, congestion: Effect on listed buildings, buildings of historic merit, ancient monuments: Fulfilment of need for mineral
1989		
Berkshire County Council	10 February 1989	Minerals policy: Fulfilment of need for mineral
South Cambridgeshire District Council	15 March 1989	Minerals policy: Traffic, highway safety, congestion: Other minerals issues
Hampshire County Council	24 May 1989	Agricultural land policy: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Staffordshire County Council	10 July 1989	Countryside and coastal area policy: Effect on landscape: Dirt, dust etc.: Noise/disturbance: Surface water drainage: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Hampshire County Council	27 July 1989	Effect on landscape: Noise/disturbance: Storage of Hazardous substances: Fulfilment of need for mineral
Hereford and Worcester County Council	15 August 1989	Effect on landscape
Hampshire County Council	8 September 1989	Dirt, dust etc.: Noise/disturbance: Traffic, highway safety, congestion
1990 to date		
Hereford and Worcester County Council (two planning appeals)	1 March 1990	Minerals policy: Dirt, dust etc.
Suffolk County Council (two planning appeals)	22 March 1990	Countryside and coastal area policy: Effect on listed buildings, buildings of historic merit, ancient monuments etc.
Buckinghamshire County Council	27 September 1990	Effect on neighbouring buildings/surrounding area: Dirt, dust etc.: Noise/disturbance: Fulfiment of need for mineral
Hampshire County Council	1 Novembr 1990	Effect on landscape: Fulfilment of need for mineral
London Borough of Hounslow (Called-in planning application)	12 November 1990	Effect on neighbouring buildings/surrounding area: Fulfilment of need for mineral

Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the initiatives taken by the Government to improve access for people with disabilities in both new and existing buildings of all types and in the built environment generally since the passage of the Disabled Persons Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have an impressive record over recent years on the promotion of initiatives aimed at improving the accessibility for people with disabilities of buildings and the built environment. As well as initiatives prompted directly by Government Ministers they include initiatives which Government Departments have promoted in co-operation with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies and organisations, both national and local. I shall be placing in the Library a list of initiatives with which my Department and other Government Departments have been directly concerned.

Homelessness

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the number of people sleeping on the streets in London.

Mr. Yeo: Having consulted front-line voluntary organisations, my Department estimates that some 2,000 to 3,000 people sleep on the streets in London. A count of persons sleeping rough is to be carried out as part of the 1991 population census.

Planning Applications (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will call in all planning applications made on land and open spaces sold by Liverpool city council to private developers.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to do so. His policy is to be very selective about calling in applications and he is unlikely to intervene on any of those in question unless they raise planning issues of more than local importance.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to consult the providers of existing services in Wales and in each county in Wales in respect of alcohol abuse about the most effective use of available cash and resources, both in respect of the £150,000 announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales on Drinkwise day in June and generally.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As a follow-up to Welsh Office circular 8/89; WHC89(14) on alcohol misuse, the Welsh Office wrote to interested organisations on 10 October 1990 inviting their views on how the £150,000 earmarked for 1990-91 might be utilised to best meet their needs. Responses received were fully taken into account in drawing up the guidance issued in WHC(90)78 and WHC(90)79.

Treatment Centres Initiative

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was set aside in his Department's budget for the treatment centres initiative in 1989-90 and 1990-91; how much was spent in 1989-90; and how much was spent in each quarter of the 1990-91 financial year to date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Funding for treatment centres is not allocated or released on a quarterly basis. The annual cost of each centre is considered in advance with the relevant health authority and is the subject of a contractual agreement. A total of £508,500 was released in 1989-90 to meet the initial cost of the setting up of the three all-Wales centres. A total of some £1·2 million has been allocated to fund treatment centres in 1990-91 of which some £598,000 has been released.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales against what criteria he intends to judge the success or failure of his Department's treatment centres initiative.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Among other factors, the evaluation of the treatment centre initiative will consider the extent to which each centre has met its contractual target on throughput and established an all-Wales referral pattern thus reducing the time patients might otherwise have to wait for treatment.

Private Rented Sector

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will undertake an investigation into the difficulties faced by tenants in the private rented sector, particularly in regard to the most vulnerable people in Welsh society.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Recent legislation has strengthened the law against harassment and illegal eviction. Local authorities are encouraged to make full use of their wide powers to control houses in multiple occupation.

Leybucht Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he now proposes to have with his German opposite number regarding their joint approach to the case of the European Commission *v.* the German Government before the European Court of Justice regarding Leybucht bay, subsequent to the Advocate-General's opinion.

Mr. David Hunt: Until we have received the Advocate-General's opinion and considered its contents I am unable to say whether discussions by the United Kingdom Government will be necessary.

National Library

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer on 10 December, if he will indicate which aspects of the staff inspection report into the national library of Wales were satisfactory and which were not.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Staff inspection reports are internal management documents and the normal procedures for dealing with them were indicated in my reply to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) on 31 October. The consultation procedure is in progress and no decisions have been made on any of the recommendations.

School Meals and Milk

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what change has taken place, in real terms, in actual expenditure on education in Wales since 1979-80 *(a)* excluding school meals and milk and *(b)* including school meals and milk; and what percentage per annum each change represents.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Paul and Wayne Darvell

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to publish the report of the Devon and Cornwall police into the conviction of Paul and Wayne Darvell; and what further action he proposes in the light of the report's conclusions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It is not the practice to publish the reports of police investigations. The report was received at the end of November. We will consider it and the representations we have received about the case in order to decide whether to intervene.

Open Prisons

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners absconded from open prisons in 1987;

(2) how many prisoners absconded from open prisons in 1988;

(3) how many prisoners absconded from open prisons in 1989;

(4) how many prisoners who absconded from open prisons in 1987 were recaptured;

(5) how many prisoners who absconded from open prisons in 1988 were recaptured;

(6) how many prisoners who absconded from open prisons in 1989 were recaptured;

(7) how many abscondees from open prisons in 1987 were on drug-related offences;

(8) how many abscondees from open prisons in 1988 were on drug-related offences;

(9) how many abscondees from open prisons in 1989 were on drug-related offences.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information on absconds during 1987 and the first five months of 1988 was not recorded in such a way as to enable absconds from open prisons to be distinguished from those who go missing from outside working parties of closed prisons or who abscond while allowed out of closed prisons on trust.

A new method of recording information was introduced in June 1988; from that date until December 1988, a total of 311 inmates absconded from open prisons. During 1989 a total of 682 inmates absconded from open prisons.

The information requested about recapture and the offences for which the inmates concerned had been imprisoned is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Subliminal Communications

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the policy of his Department towards the use of subliminal techniques in all types of communication media; and what estimate he has made of any possible dangers to the public from exposure to subliminal techniques.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government oppose the use of subliminal techniques in broadcasting. Because of the danger of unacceptable exploitation of the public, they have been prohibited for many years and will remain so.

Notifiable Offences

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of notifiable offences for each uniformed member of the police establishment in each police authority in England and Wales for each year from 1986 to 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded per police officer by police force area

Police force area	*Offences per officer* 1986	1987	1988	1989
Avon and Somerset	31	33	32	32
Bedfordshire	39	40	38	38
Cambridgeshire	28	29	28	30
Cheshire	25	27	26	25
Cleveland	39	40	39	41
Cumbria	26	24	23	24
Derbyshire	26	26	24	27
Devon and Cornwall	26	26	26	27
Dorset	30	31	29	31
Durham	33	33	32	33
Essex	27	27	26	27
Gloucestershire	25	29	29	30
Greater Manchester	47	45	42	42
Hampshire	31	31	30	31
Hertfordshire	27	26	24	25
Humberside	41	44	42	45
Kent	26	26	26	28
Lancashire	28	29	30	28
Leicestershire	28	28	28	31
Lincolnshire	27	29	27	29
London, City of	10	9	8	9
Merseyside	36	35	30	28
Metropolitan Police	29	27	26	27
Norfolk	30	31	31	32
Northamptonshire	36	36	34	34
Northumbria	48	49	46	51
North Yorkshire	26	27	25	25
Nottinghamshire	42	43	42	45
South Yorkshire	32	32	30	32
Staffordshire	27	26	26	27
Suffolk	26	26	25	27
Surrey	20	20	19	20
Sussex	24	23	23	25
Thames Valley	34	33	30	33
Warwickshire	23	25	23	25
West Mercia	27	27	25	26
West Midlands	40	39	34	33
West Yorkshire	34	35	33	36
Wiltshire	27	24	24	24
Dyfed Powys	19	20	21	19
Gwent	27	27	24	24
North Wales	27	28	27	26
South Wales	35	35	37	37
ENGLAND AND WALES	32	31	30	31

Missing Persons

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the computerised national register of missing persons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 11 December 1990]:* Consideration is at present being given to the establishment of a small co-ordinating bureau which will handle inquiries about missing persons from the public and the media. In the longer term, plans for the new police national computer will greatly assist the follow-up to such inquiries, but this is unlikely to be fully effective until 1992.

Registrars (Information)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information, other than statistical information, he requires from registrars of births, deaths and marriages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

We do not directly require any information from registrars of births, deaths and marriages. Registrars, by law, are required to send copies to the Registrar-General of all register entries made in the area for which they are responsible. The form of these register entries is prescribed by regulations made by the Registrar-General which require my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's approval. In addition, the information contained in each birth, stillbirth and death register is also required to be returned to the prescribed medical officer of the district health authority for the place in which the event occurred under the provisions of the National Health Service Act 1977.

HEALTH

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated for major heart surgery at St. George's hospital, Tooting, in the period January to November 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to Dr. Enid Vincent, the chairman of the Wandsworth district health authority, who may be able to provide this information.

Elderly People's Homes (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance in respect of elderly people's homes his Department will be giving to Nottinghamshire county council arising from the visit of Councillor Joan Taylor to the Minister on 11 December.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Decisions on the use of resources available to social services authorities are a matter for local determination.

It was announced this week that Nottinghamshire is being given on annual capital guideline for personal social services of £2·03 million for 1991-92, which represents an increase of £0·514 million, or 34 per cent., over 1990-91. Nottinghamshire will also receive an increase of 25·6 per cent. in its personal social services standard spending assessment to £87·6 million for 1991-92.

Haemophiliacs (Aids)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliacs,who contracted the AIDS virus through blood transfusions, have died since 1986.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since the beginning of 1986 up to the end of November 1990, the number of deaths of haemophiliacs with the AIDS virus reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre and the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit has been 140. Haemophiliacs contracted the AIDS virus through contaminated blood products and not blood transfusions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Budget

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the annual level of his Department's budget on (i) supplementary benefit/income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) other means-tested benefits for each year since 1979, both at current and 1990 prices.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table

£ million

Prices	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit												
Current	2,436	3,172	4,840	6,261	5,591	6,471	7,446	7,967	7,956	7,582	7,585	8,461
1990-91	5,276	5,805	8,078	9,757	8,328	9,172	10,009	10,356	9,807	8,710	8,192	8,461
Housing Benefit												
Current	278	365	562	1,003	2,516	4,001	4,459	4,869	5,150	4,936	5,154	1,777
1990-91	602	668	938	1,563	3,748	5,671	5,994	6,329	6,348	5,671	5,566	1,777
Family Credit/Family Income Supplement												
Current	27	42	66	94	123	126	130	161	180	394	435	466
1990-91	58	77	110	146	183	179	175	209	222	453	470	466
Community Charge Benefit												
Current	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	214	2,250
1990-91	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	231	2,250

Note:

From 1990-91, central government support for rent rebate appears in the DOE and Welsh Office programmes, as rent rebate subsidy in England and Wales will be paid from local authorities housing revenue accounts.

The amounts for 1990-91 are:—

Rent rebates (England) £2,238 million.

Rent rebates (Wales) £158 million.

Diets

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he has received any communication from either of the authors of the report cited in the replies to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 23 June 1989, *Official Report*, columns *278-79* and 8 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *420*, on the cost of diets for people with AIDS or HIV infection; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has received any further advice on the cost of diets for people with AIDS or HIV infection further to those cited in the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe of 2 April, *Official Report*, column *491*, and if he will make a further statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I am not aware of any communications from either of the authors referred to. The advice we have received on diets for people with AIDS or HIV infection remains unchanged.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish his comments on the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on the draft regulations on housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on the draft Housing Benefit (General) Amendment No. 3 Regulations 1990 has been

received and its contents are currently under consideration. The report and the Government's response will be published in the usual way when the regulations are laid.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families with children in receipt of housing benefit are also receiving family credit, broken down into couples and lone parents.

Miss Widdecombe: Excluding community charge rebate cases in Scotland, at 31 May 1989 there were an estimated 38,000 couples and 22,000 lone parents receiving both housing benefit and family credit.

Lone Parents

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents living on income support have earnings, broken down between those with children aged under 11 years and those with children aged 11 to 15 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of lone parents who are receiving income support and have earnings, broken down by reference to the age of the youngest child is as follows:

	Number
Under 11	59,000
Age 11-15	19,000
Age 16 and over	4,000
Total	82,000

Source: 1989 Annual Statistical Inquiry.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents living on income support have help with their mortgage interest payments; and what the average value of such help is for each lone parent family.

Miss Widdecombe: There are some 68,000 lone parents receiving income support which includes help with mortgage interest payments. The average weekly amount for mortgage interest taken into account in the assessment of income support is £30·45.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the criteria under which pensioners qualify for a severe weather payment; and how many such payments were made in each of the past five years.

Mr. Scott: A payment of £5 is available from the social fund for any period of seven consecutive days when the average temperature is 0 deg or below. Pensioners who receive income support are eligible to claim, and savings over £1,000 are taken into account on a pound-for-pound basis.

Information on the number of payments made to pensioners over the past five years is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the places at which temperatures are measured in order to determine whether cold weather payments should be made available; and if he will state in each case the area relating to these trigger points for this purpose.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the schedule to the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments General (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (SI 2302/1990), which were laid before the House on 21 November and came into force on 12 December. These regulations list all the national climatological message weather stations which act as trigger points, and state which areas are linked to each message station.

Departmental Appointees

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost of fees and reimbursements to people appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies by his Department.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 December 1990]:* People appointed to *(a)* public, *(b)* non-governmental and *(c)* other bodies were paid the following fees and reimbursements during the 1989-90 financial year:

	Fees £	*Re-imbursements* £
(a)	4,869,069	1,028,190
(b)	—	3,200
(c)	—	16,522

Note: In addition to the above, salaries of £768,181 were paid to appointees of public bodies and £14,501 in salaries to appointees of other bodies.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of enabling people who qualify for the lower rate of mobility component of the disability living allowance before the age of 65 years to receive the higher rate if their mobility needs increase after that age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 6 December 1990]:* The extent to which those qualifying for the lower rate of the mobility component would be likely to become entitled to the higher rate after reaching age 65 cannot be predicted with certainty. It is estimated, however, that the eventual cost would be in the order of up to £20 million a year.

TRANSPORT

Express 158s

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the railway inspectorate has made an assessment of the effectiveness of automatic couplings on the express 158s.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the deputy chief inspecting officer inspected a class 158 unit before these vehicles entered service in Scotland, and that the automatic couplings fitted to class 158 units are fitted to other BR trains on which they have been operating without difficulty. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate will await the outcome of BR's internal inquiry into the recent incidents in which class 158 units have become uncoupled in service before deciding whether any action on its part is required.

Aston Expressway Sliproads

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he expects work on repairs to the sliproads between Tyburn road and the Aston expressway, Birmingham, to start; whether he will detail the way in which repairs are to be undertaken; how long they are contracted to take; which company is to carry them out; what is the value of the contract; and whether it includes a bonus clause for early completion or a penalty clause for late completion.

Mr. Chope: Advance works have already begun and demolition work is due to start before Christmas. The slip roads should be reopened in the summer.

The damaged structure will be demolished first followed by repairs to the approach spans and columns and finally reconstruction of the main deck. A number of contracts will be let for which tendering procedures are on-going. They will not include a bonus clause for early completion because the unusual nature of the work makes one inappropriate, but they will include a liquidated damages clause for late completion. The contracts will specify very tight programmes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

R-plate Scheme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has commissioned to assess the effectiveness of the R-plate scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is assessing a recent proposal from an academic institution for research into the comparative experience of newly qualified drivers in Great Britain where there is no R-plate system and Northern Ireland. A decision will be taken shortly.

Homelessness

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated number of homeless persons in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available prior to April 1989 when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was given responsibility for dealing with the accommodation needs of all homeless people under the Housing (NI) Order 1988.

I am advised by the chairman of the Housing Executive that the number of applicants accepted as being either homeless or threatened with homelessness since 1 April 1989 is as follows:

	Number
1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	5,001
1 April 1990 to 30 September 1990	3,534

Hazelbank Park

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will take steps to have Hazelbank park on the northern side of Belfast lough declared an area of outstanding natural beauty and an area of special control.

Mr. Needham: No. The area is already shown in the Belfast urban area plan 2001 as lands reserved for landscape amenity or recreation use.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Romania

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all visits of Government Ministers and officials to Romania since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following Government Ministers and senior officials have visited Romania since 1979:

	Minister or official
1979	
13–15 February	Sir Reginald Hibbert, Deputy Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1980	
12–14 March	Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
13–17 October	Mr. Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Trade.
1981	None
1982	
12–14 January	Sir Antony Acland, Permanent Under-Secretary of State Designate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
29 September–3 October	Mr. Malcolm Rifkind, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1983	None
1984	
3–6 April	Mr. Peter Corley, Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (as Chairman of the Romanian-British Joint Commission).
8–12 September	Delegation of the Royal College of Defence Studies, led by Air Vice Marshal B. H. Newton.
16–21 September	Major-General C. N. Thompson, Director of the Military Survey.
15–16 October	Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, First Sea Lord.
1985	
8–10 February	Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
14–18 June	Sir John Burgh, Director General of the British Council.
21–23 October	Mr. Derek Thomas, Political Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1986	
21–25 April	Mr. Alistair Hunter, Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (leading United Kingdom delegation to the 13th Session of United Kingdom-Romania Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Collaboration).

	Minister or official
21–23 May	Mr. Timothy Renton, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1987	
1–3 November	Sir Patrick Wright, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1988	
7–10 March	Mr. David Ratford, Assistant Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
15–19 April	Mr. Alan Clark, Minister for Trade, Department of Trade and Industry.
14–17 October	Sir Mark Russell, Chief Clerk, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
1989	None
1990	
15–16 January	Mr. William Waldegrave, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
27 February—1 March	Mr. John Redwood, Minister for Corporate Affairs, Department of Trade and Industry.
27–28 September	Sir David Orr, Chairman, British Council.
7–11 October	Sir Reginald Doyle, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services.

A number of more junior officials, primarily from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, also paid duty visits to Romania in this period.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what current measures there are to help the process of economic and political reform in Romania;

(2) if he will list all offers of aid made by Her Majesty's Government to Romania in each year since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No offers of aid were made by Her Majesty's Government to Romania between 1979 and December 1989. Since then we have sent humanitarian aid, bilaterally and through the European Community, totalling some £6·5 million. We have spent or are spending about £190,000 on measures to promote political and economic reform in Romania. We shall also be responsible for a proportion of the cost of an EC programme to aid Romanian children's homes, which has already committed over £9 million. I am arranging for full details to be placed in the Library of the House.

Bulgaria

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will assist Bulgaria with urgent medical aid.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are contributing to the European Community's recently approved mother and child health care programme for Bulgaria. Additional requests received during the EC-Bulgaria joint commission on 30 November are now being considered, and will be discussed at the 14 to 15 December European Council.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made by the Government encouraging the European Commission to consider Bulgarian requests for food assistance.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Bulgarian requests for food assistance were discussed during the meeting of the EC-Bulgaria joint commission in Sofia on 30 November, and will next be discussed at the 14 to 15 December European Council. We have made it clear that we would support such assistance.

USSR

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrangements which will be made for the dispatch of food and medical aid to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; how much will be involved; who will undertake the distribution; and what advice he is giving to members of the public keen to help.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have not yet taken a decision on the provision of food or medical aid to the Soviet Union. We will be discussing the matter with our European partners at this week's European Council. We believe it is important to tackle the underlying problems of distribution and, with British companies, are making specific efforts to this end. Members of the public who wish to help may send parcels to the Soviet embassy at 18 Kensington Palace gardens, London W8 4QX, or make out a cheque to "Aid to the Soviet People", account No. 00107301, held at Barclays bank, Marble Arch branch. The first consignment of parcels was dispatched from Stansted airport on 12 December.

Bishop Laslo Tokes

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the infringements of the human rights of the Romanian bishop, Laslo Tokes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received no representations about Pastor Tokes. We are investigating allegations about infringements of his human rights. I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

A1

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to reply to the letter sent to his predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), on 19 September, by the hon. Member for East Lothian about Government policy on the A1 road.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I intend to write to the hon. Member very shortly.

Scottish Prison Service

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to resolve the dispute between the Scottish prison service and the Scottish Prison Officers Association.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am concerned to ensure that the industrial action threatened by the Scottish Prison Officers Association is avoided if at all possible. Such action can result only in an adverse effect on both members of staff and the service as a whole.

Discussions on the issues involved have been under way for some time now between prison service management and the trade union side, which includes the association, and further meetings are being held before Christmas. I am kept fully abreast of developments.

Gaelic Broadcasting Committee

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is now in a position to name the membership of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990 place responsibility for appointing the membership of the Gaelic Television Committee on the Independent Television Commission.

Sea Transport (Subsidy)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for shipping subsidies for sea transport services in Scotland in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the estimates I propose to make available in 1991-92 total subsidy provision of £12·9 million compared with £11·7 million in 1990-91. The deficit subsidy for Caledonian MacBrayne will be £5·8 million. Tariff rebates subsidies of up to £5·5 million will be available for P and O services to Orkney and Shetland; and of £1·6 million for coastal shippers.

The total of subsidies available will maintain support in real terms. This reflects the Government's continuing commitment to assisting the essential sea transport services to the western and northern isles.

DEFENCE

Collins Printers

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been undertaken by Collins, printers (Glasgow) for his Department within the past 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMSO, which acts on behalf of the Ministry of Defence in placing printing work, has not placed any work with Harper Collins, Printers (Glasgow) during the past 12 months for the Ministry of Defence.

Conscription

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what administrative arrangements have been made in the event of reintroduction of conscription in anticipation of military escalation in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. We have no plans to reintroduce conscription.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for the provision of an occupational health service for employees within his Department, stating *(a)* how many staff are employed to provide occupational health services, *(b)* how many of those staff are qualified nurses and *(c)* how many employees work in his Department in total.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All civil service departmental and agencies have access to the Civil Service Occupational Health Service, which employs some 100 fully qualified occupational health professionals. Separate to this, the Surgeon General is responsible for routine occupational health care for all civilians and the referral of casework for the industrial grades, in service establishments. The Ministry of Defence employs 116 civilian medical practitioners and 327 civilian nurses, for the occupational health care of civilian and service personnel. At 31 October 1990, the Ministry of Defence employed 302,454 service personnel, 90,048 non-industrial and 50,289 industrial civil servants.

Occupational health provision for service personnel is included as part of the full primary and secondary care they receive within their conditions of service.

Tactical Air-to-surface Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the NATO policy on the permanent basing of NATO tactical air-to-surface missiles on the European mainland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO's policy remains as set out in the July 1990 London declaration, where it is stated that, to keep the peace, the alliance must maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces, based in Europe, and kept up to date where necessary.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the maintenance of the projected number of Trident submarines, launch tubes and missile warheads for so long as other states possess, or are seeking to acquire, a nuclear weapons capability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement on "Options for Change" on 25 July, we shall retain our strategic deterrent with a four-boat Trident force.

Privatisations

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the privatisations with which his Department has been involved since 1979, indicating in each case the date of the sale, the proceeds of the sale and the estimated current value of the company.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The only privatisation my Department has undertaken since 1979 was the sale of Royal Ordnance plc, following an open competition, to British Aerospace plc in April 1987. The net proceeds from the sale were £185 million.

My Department has no means of estimating the current market value of the company, since its shares are not publicly quoted and its assets are not separately identified in the accounts of its parent company.

32 Base Workshop, Bicester

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future at 32 base workshop, Bicester.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A wide-ranging review of the Army's base repair organisation is under way. Consultants have provided early advice specific to the future of 32 base workshop, Bicester. They assess that the facilities and capacity there are surplus to the requirements of the base repair organisation and recommend that the workshop should close as soon as possible. We are consulting the trade unions on this recommendation in accordance with agreed procedures.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from service personnel concerning nuclear safety.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 7 December 1990]:* We have received no formal representations from service personnel on this matter.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Lord President of the Council what estimate has been made of the cost of the most expensive parliamentary answers; and what guidelines are used by Government Departments in assessing whether it is too expensive to reply to a parliamentary question.

Mr. MacGregor: Records of the actual cost of the most expensive parliamentary answers are not kept centrally. It is, however, estimated that some 1 to 2 per cent. of all parliamentary questions are likely to exceed the disproportionate cost threshold (currently £250). Any questions thought likely to fall into in this category are drawn to the attention of the relevant Ministers for decision before any significant expenditure is incurred. It is for the Minister to decide whether to decline to answer on the grounds of disproportionate cost or whether it is in the public interest for a full or partial reply to be given.

Official Report

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council if, pursuant to his answer of 12 December concerning the availability of the *Official Report* on compact disc, he will take steps to ensure that following its commencement in that form a copy on compact disc will be available from the Vote Office to those hon. Members who request it.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall invite the relevant authorities of the House to consider the implications of making a CD Rom version of the *Official Report* available from the Vote Office.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the numbers of people on employment training in Chatham and Sunderland at 30 March, and in Avon, Chatham and Sunderland at 30 September 1989 and the numbers that have not had a place on a training scheme or found employment on leaving employment training in the areas and at the dates stated above.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested for Avon and Sunderland is given in the table. Information for Chatham is not available.

Employment Training

	Avon	*Sunderland*
In training at 30 March 1990	—	3,400
Leavers July 1989—March 1990 not in work or on a course or further education after 3 months	49%	66%
In training at 30 September 1989	2,700	3,400
Leavers July 1989—September 1989 not in work or on a course or further education after 3 months	49%	64%

Trade Unions

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what reasons have been given for failure to submit AR21 returns to the trade union certification officer, by those trade unions which have so failed to submit them; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many trade unions have failed to submit their AR21s by 1 June 1990 to the certification officer for trade unions and employer associations as required by the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974; and if he will list them.

Mr. Forth: Monitoring trade unions' compliance with the provisions of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 as regards the submission of annual returns is a matter for the certification officer, an independent statutory authority. I have referred the questions to the certification officer who will be replying shortly.

Privatisations

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the privatisations with which his Department has been involved since 1979, indicating in each case the date of the sale, the proceeds of the sale and the estimated current value of the company.

Mr. Jackson: Professional and Executive Recruitment (PER) was privatised in September 1988. The net proceeds of the sale were £5·1 million. It is now a privately owned company and it is not possible, nor appropriate, for my Department to estimate the current value of the company.

The other privatisation in which my Department has been involved is that of the Skills Training Agency (STA). Some of STA's property interests are still on the market so it is not yet possible to state the final proceeds of the sale.

Science Parks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the available EEC money for science park development has been taken up by universities and polytechnics in this country and other agencies.

Mr. Jackson: The Department of Employment is responsible for the European social fund, which provides money to support the running costs of vocational training schemes and employment measures.

Information about ESF projects in science parks is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hotels

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any proposals to extend the provisions of the Hotel Proprietors Act 1956 relating to loss of or damage to a guest's property to all places which offer accommodation to paying guests.

Mr. Forth: There are no such plans.

ENERGY

Privatisations

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the privatisations with which his Department has been involved since 1979, indicating in each case the date of the sale, the proceeds of the sale and the estimated current value of the company.

Mr. Wakeham: The privatisations with which my Department has been involved since 1979 are as follows:

	Date of Sale	*Net Equity Proceeds to Government (£ million)*	*Current Market Value[1] (£ million)*
Britoil[2]	1982	536	
(Secondary sale)[3]	1985	426	
Enterprise Oil	1984	382	2,786
Wytch Farm[3]	1984	149	
British Gas	1986	5,143	10,120
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	[4]5,182	[5]6,221

[1] At Friday 7th December 1990—*Source:* Financial Times.
[2] Now a wholly owned subsidiary of British Petroleum.
[3] Now owned by a consortium of companies.
[4] Gross equity proceeds.
[5] Market value at Wednesday 12th December—*Source:* Financial Times.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Newspapers (Registration)

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advantages accrue to a publication which is registered at the Post Office as a newspaper; who controls registration; and what criteria have to be fulfilled to achieve registration.

Mr. Leigh: Operational matters of this kind fall within the responsibility of the Post Office. However, I understand that publishers of any publication registered at the Post Office as a newspaper may send newspapers by first-class mail at the second-class postage rate. Registration, which costs £6 per annum, is carried out by the Royal Mail's district offices. The principal criteria for registration are that not less than one third of the publication consists of news or current topics or articles relating thereto; the publication is published at intervals of not more than seven days and is printed and published in the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, the Commonwealth, or the EC; and that it has the full title and date printed prominently on the first page.

Postal Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration of the draft proposals from the European Commission on postal services has taken place *(a)* by United Kingdom Ministers, and *(b)* in the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Leigh: The European Commission has not yet published its draft proposals on postal services, and does not expect to do so until next year. United Kingdom Ministers and officials have, however, played, and will continue to play, an active part in the appropriate EC fora in the development of proposals for the Commission's Green Paper.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what future discussions will take place on proposals from the European Community on postal services.

Mr. Leigh: The European Commission expects to publish its Green Paper on postal services in the new year. This will be followed by a period for consultation during which all interested parties will be encouraged to express their views.

Environment Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has received an invitation to participate in the conference on environmental agenda for management development to be held at Brunel university on 10 December.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* Yes. The conference organisers contacted my Department, and I am glad to say that we were represented at it.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service Pensions Scheme

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received advocating the extension of payment of civil service widows' pensions to the widows of post-retirement marriages with civil servants who retired before April 1978.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since my hon. Friend, the former Paymaster General, replied to a similar question from my hon. Friend on 15 October this year, at column *716*, the civil service unions have submitted a claim for improvements in the provision made by the civil service pension scheme for the widows of post-retirement marriages.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will reconsider his decision not to amend the civil service pension scheme to provide for the payment of pensions to the widows of post-retirement marriages whose husbands retired before 6 April 1978.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government have no plans to extend the present arrangements so that account is taken of pensionable service before 6 April 1978.

North Sea Oil Revenue

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total income to the Exchequer from North Sea oil revenue *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Maples: Total tax revenues from North sea oil production in the financial years from 1973-74 to 1978-79 amounted to £944 million and from 1979-80 to 1990-91 are forecast at £70,200 million.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest balance of payments figures *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding trade in oil.

Mr. Mellor: The information is available in table A1 of the monthly review of external trade statistics, available in the Library of the House, or on the Central Statistical Office database, which may also be accessed through the Library.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The ECOFIN Council met in Brussels on 10 December. I represented the United Kingdom.

Discussion focused on the economic situation in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, and the response that the Community might make towards assisting their progress towards developing market economies and appropriate adjustment programmes. There was discussion of the possible methods of providing such assistance to the Soviet Union, in particular technical assistance, and the most appropriate Community response to the problems of food distribution, as preparation for the European Council.

The Council also discussed the question of G24 financial assistance for the countries of eastern Europe. It agreed that it was important that any such assistance should be in support of IMF programmes with appropriate conditionality and that contributions should be obtained from countries outside the EC.

It was agreed that a proposal to disburse the second tranche of the $1 billion medium-term loan to Hungary, agreed earlier this year, should be referred to the 17 December ECOFIN Council for decision.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue will comment on draft employee share ownership trust deeds submitted to it.

Mr. Maude: My predecessor announced in May the introduction of an arrangement under which the Inland Revenue is willing to examine executed employee share ownership trust deeds and to inform the trustees whether in its view the trust meets the qualifying conditions of schedule 5 to the Finance Act 1989. I have now authorised the Inland Revenue also, in the context of its responsibilities for administration of the law relating to employee share ownership schemes, to examine and comment on draft trust deeds submitted to it, so as to assist those seeking to establish qualifying ESOP trusts.

Income Tax

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the rates of personal income tax would need to be increased if *(a)* education, *(b)* education, fire and police and *(c)* the whole of the community charge, less expenditure on social services and housing, were transferred to income tax; and if he will also show the estimated savings on community charge benefit in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 10 December 1990]:* The implications for personal income tax and for community charge benefit costs of transferring local authority functions to central Government would depend entirely on the extent to which there was a reduction in the grant paid to local authorities.

Debt Relief

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the likely debt relief gained by the least-developed countries eligible for assistance under the Chancellor's Trinidad terms.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 12 December 1990]:* If all bilateral official creditors were to cancel two thirds of the stock of debt owed by the 19 countries that have previously benefited from Toronto terms this would reduce the total stock of debt owed by these countries by about $18 billion.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the Republic of Ireland; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of monitoring and control procedures of Irish beef imports into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: There have been 26 confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the Republic of Ireland out of a total cattle population of over 7 million. The scientific veterinary committee of the European Community considered the question of trade from countries that have a low incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and concluded that no further measures are necessary in addition to the current animal and public health rules.

Organic Farming

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level of support his Department currently offers for organic farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Farmers engaged in organic farming qualify for the support given to all farmers under the set-aside and pilot extensification schemes, the farm and conservation grant scheme and the nitrate sensitive areas schemes. Support under these arrangements can be used to assist farmers in converting to organic agriculture. Further support is available in the form of advice from the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service. This Department also provides grant aid amounting to £60,000 per annum to the United Kingdom register of organic food standards that is establishing standards and will be responsible for their enforcement in the United Kingdom.

The Department also supports research directly related to organic farming and we intend in 1991 to increase our funding for such research to about £500,000 per annum. In addition, other research into aspects of conventional farming relevant to organic production amounted to £892,000 last year. We have commissioned a study of the economics of the production and marketing of organically grown farm produce in Great Britain and a full report is expected to be published in spring 1991.

Lastly, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced earlier this year that he intended to issue a consultation document outlining a five-year scheme giving aid to those wishing to convert from conventional or organic production within the framework of the EC extensification rules. The Commission subsequently indicated that the proposed scheme was not consistent with the existing EC rules, but its recent proposals on agriculture and the environment may provide the means by which a scheme could be introduced.

This is a considerable package of support for organic agriculture and I hope that it can help British farmers to play a more prominent part in the small but growing market for organic produce.

Price Stabilisers

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects a decision on whether stabilisers will be triggered following the 1990 harvest.

Mr. Curry: Stabilisers have triggered price cuts for rapeseed (minus 15·5 per cent.), sunflower seed (minus 21 per cent.), soya (minus 30 per cent.), and peas and beans (minus 20·02 per cent.) following the 1990 harvest. A decision on the cereals stabiliser is due to be reached in February.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *141*, what is the acreage of land set aside in the United Kingdom in each year since the set-aside programme started; and what is his estimate of the reduction of cereals and meat in tonnage and value in real and in 1990 prices.

Mr. Curry: In 1988 and 1989 respectively, approximately 52,000 and 49,000 hectares of land were entered into set-aside in the United Kingdom. A total of 1,990 entrants have applied to enter approximately 31,000 hectares into the scheme. I will be in a position to assess the effects on production when I have the results of an evaluation commissioned by the Department from Reading university.

Drift Nets

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the proposed amendment to the EC regulation 3094/86 to restrict the use of drift nets to prevent fishing of tuna and billfish and limit net lengths to less than 2·5 km on boats registered in EC member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom fully supported the United Nations resolution to curtail or ban the use of large-scale pelagic drift net fishing on the high seas. We are currently examining carefully the Commission's proposal, made available to member states on 10 December, although not in final form, which would limit the use of any drift nets to 2·5 km per boat whatever the target species. It should be noted that very few United Kingdom vessels use drift nets with an aggregate length of more than 2·5 km.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 182**

SESSION 1990–91

3rd December—14th December, 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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